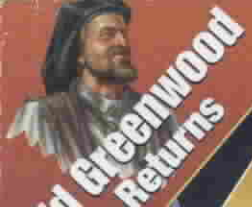

The New Adventures of Volo

267

Dragon®

MAGAZIN

4 Alternate Underdarks

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THE UNDERDARK

Dragon®

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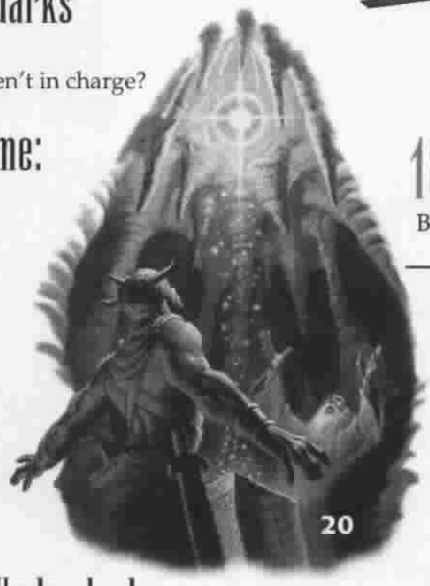

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ON THE COVER

Larry Elmore has had this thing about the drow for a long, long time. We first learned of it when he insisted on putting a drow on the cover of issue #200. It's been a while since we featured Larry's work on the cover of *DRAGON® Magazine*, so this seemed like a perfect match.

A handy holiday field guide
from your friends at Shining Armor

Father Christmas a.k.a. Santa Claus

SKILLS: Lie Detection
Present Wrapping
Bag Packing
Pipe Smoking
Sleigh Driving
Chimney Climbing

FREQUENCY: Annually
(Father Christmas is never a random encounter.)

TREASURE: All -- Except cash

MOVEMENT: Rooftop: 6"
Chimney: 48"
Sleigh: ∞

ARMOR: Furs and blubber

PSIONIC POWERS:

Telepathy: Knows when you've been bad or good

Clairsomnolence: Knows when you are sleeping

Clairsentience: Knows when you're awake

Levitation: Chimneys only

MORAL OUTLOOK: Lawful Jolly

Father Christmas' jolly outlook prevents emotion-affecting attacks from having any effect on him or anyone within sight of him. The drawback to this is that he tends to overeat to be polite and battles a persistent weight problem. Rumors spread by his enemies of possible hypertension induced by fatty snacks are unproven.

KNOWN POWERS:

Elf Domination: Father Christmas can use a combination of cajoling, guilt, and mental domination to force nearby elves to make children's toys one month out of every 12.

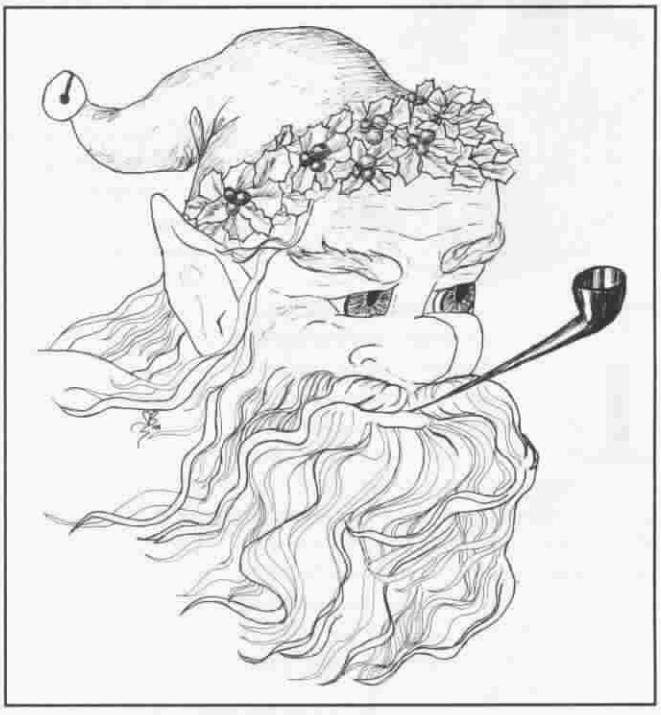
Invulnerability to Cold: Father Christmas' workshop is unheated. When elves complain, he usually replies, "Feels fine in here to me."

Science Resistance: Undetectable by electronic means.

Smoke Telekinesis: Santa can cause nearby smoke or vapor to react to his thoughts. Though he is famous for his smoke rings, which encircle his head like a wreath, Father Christmas also uses this power to wrap shower steam around himself before walking to his room to dress.

Prescient Gift Giving: Not only can Santa reward good children with great toys and punish bad ones with coal, but he knows to give in-between kids socks.

KNOWN WEAKNESSES: Father Christmas is compelled to take a single bite out of any sweet, pastry, cookie, or cake left out for him.



KNOWN IMMUNITIES: Father Christmas is immune to warm, slightly rancid milk which has been left out over night for him.

KNOWN ARTIFACTS:

Sleigh of Holding: Father Christmas' sleigh can hold any amount of gear. The items must fit within the confines of the sleigh for this effect to function. As a result, many of the items emerging from the sleigh require assembly.

Reindeer of Mighty Travelling: Santa is frequently accompanied by ten reindeer. These reindeer have an infinite move while airborne. They also allow Father Christmas an airborne bombardment attack. There are 5 male and 5 female reindeer: Dasher, Dancer, Donder, Blitzen, Comet, Cupid, Prancer, Vixen, Rudolph, and Olive, the other reindeer.

SPECIAL DEFENSES:

Father Christmas has omniscience in a one dwelling radius around himself. This omniscience power does not extend to Mother Christmas.

SPECIAL ATTACK:

Carbon Teleportation: Father Christmas can make coal, diamonds, or graphite appear in any stocking at will. This reduces any sock-wearing opponent's movement to 1".

Who were the ad wizards who came up with this one?
Find out at SHINGARMOR.com.
(We sell lots of cool stuff at way below retail.)
You could also call us at 800.718.1440

The Wyrm's Turn™

Claustrophobia

Despite a paralytic fear of tight spaces, I did my share of spelunking in my youth. It's still not clear whether the experience made me more or less terrified of close spaces, but it gave me some of my favorite spooky stories—including the one by which I divide old friends and new. (Old friends sigh and roll their eyes whenever I tell the Bear Story.) It also gave me a taste of what it must be like to delve into the subterranean world of the Underdark.

While the D&D® game didn't create the concept of a world beneath the world, it certainly claimed squatter's rights early in its existence. How many gamers haven't made at least one foray into the world of kuo-toa, deep gnomes, and the vile illithids? And how many of us can honestly say we've never played a drow or half-drow character at least once? Drow have even made their way into "mainstream" fantasy fiction, though most of the authors who borrow them claim they're influenced not by some roleplaying game but by the dark elves of Nordic mythology or the mythological archetype of the Underworld.

What makes the Underdark tick?

You and I know the truth, of course.

There's no doubt that the physical attributes of the Underdark are striking, with its weird geometries and alien colors. None of this is easy to convey in a D&D game, leaving open the question of why the Underdark has become such a compelling icon of fantasy roleplaying games. The answer lies elsewhere.

Even in the maps for the original Underdark adventure, *Descent Into the Depths of the Earth*, the squiggly little cavern tunnels looked cramped and uncomfortable. These were not regions you could easily capture with mere graph paper. They defied the horizontal and the vertical, and they refused to be described in terms of a "10-foot wide" corridor.

Yet every side of the maps had an unfinished passage, some tangential route left "To Be Determined" by the Dungeon Master. While not as overtly fabulous as "Here There Be Dragons," those vague legends proved that the Underdark was, in fact, as endless as the imagination. An excursion into its depths never really ended as long as there was one more of those unterminated tunnels and a DM who could conceive its undiscovered destination.

Despite its infinite possibilities, the Underdark is still compartmentalized, if not as neatly as a gridlike dungeon of rectangular chambers. A DM can control the characters' wanderings in a way that would be impossible on the typical wilderness map. On the surface world, heroes need a compelling reason *not* to poke around beyond the Dark Forest or else they're on their way to unmapped regions. In the Underdark, your choices are limited to those passages down which the DM has already designed.

These paradoxes of subterranean adventuring might be interesting, but none of them truly defines what makes the Underdark so compelling. The real answer, at least to wimpy spelunkers like me, is that it's damned scary in those caves!

Dave Gross, *Editor*

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You Got Fantasy in My Sci-Fi!

Give me a break! Vampires in the ALTERNITY® game? Repeat after me: "Science fiction is not horror." All together now: "Science fiction is not horror."

Horror plays off of the fears of children. Science fiction hypothesizes the future of those children. Science fiction might not always be the pretty future that some authors want to display, but horror never has a good side.

There are ways of creating scary scenarios for the ALTERNITY game. Throw in a couple of klicks or n'sss and you've got yourself a fearful 1st-level party. A dark mystery can also scare the party easily enough. There is no need to bring in the archtypes of the horror genre. Doing so only dilutes the game.

> *All together now: "Science fiction is not horror."*

I haven't seen the DARK•MATTER™ setting, so the elements of horror might have a place there, but not in the STAR*DRIVE® game. The STAR*DRIVE setting is science fiction pure and simple. It is based on what we can become and what we might find out in space.

Randy Bisig
Jefferson City, MO

While at least one member of the editorial staff was previously infected by the purist bug, we've all been won over to the notion of vampires as part of science fiction for two reasons: The line between SF and fantasy has already been irreparably blurred by such popular shows as The X-Files, *and purists are generally clever enough to leave out the bits they don't like.*

*We agree that the DARK•MATTER setting makes a more appropriate place for vampires than does the STAR*DRIVE® campaign. On the other hand, some of Sean Reynolds's ideas for vampires in the far future were so cool that we just had to pass them along to the artists.*

The DARK•MATTER campaign setting fell into our hot little hands just today, so we're still drooling over the gorgeous book. By the time you read this, however, you'll have had a couple months to come up with your own campaign ideas, whether they're more supernatural or scientific. Write in to tell us which direction your campaign has taken.

Rein in Those Themes!

I would like to see one less theme-related article per issue. While any article has ideas I can use outside its context, too many articles related to a subject far from my campaign are undesirable.

Another thing I would like to see less of is the apparently popular "Dragon Ecology" department. While it is amusing and occasionally inspiring, I think the concept has been over-used, and I would rather see fewer of these articles.

Articles I would like to see in the magazine, some of which frequently appear already, are campaign journals. Such articles might focus either on some part of a Wizards of the Coast® world like the DRAGONLANCE®, GREYHAWK®, or RAVENLOFT® settings, or they might be an addition to the campaign like the Black Pegasus Company (from many issues back). Such articles should ideally include aspects unique to or characteristic of the locale, such as races, character roles, unusual or mystical places to visit, and adventure hooks. A good example of such an article is "The Dimernesti" from issue #250, and there are, of course, many more.

I am content with the present dosage of non-AD&D® articles. The DRAGON-MIRTH™ department, *Nodwick*, and the *Knights of the Dinner Table* are excellent and greatly entertaining. The graphic design is likewise very pleasing to the eye. Keep up the good work!

Finally I would like to express my wish for the return of the long gone "Roleplaying Reviews," a column that used to review both TSR games and those of other companies. It was a great service to the roleplaying community, and I am sure it will contribute to the sales of TSR products reviewed.

Oran Magal
magalart@zahav.net.il

We determine the themes of issues in two different ways: Sometimes we pick one we think covers a subject we've neglected for a while (as with the "High-Level Campaigns" theme coming up in a few months), while at other times a theme "emerges" from the submissions stack. If we see two or three elf articles we like, we make a theme of it. This year, expect a little more diversity in most issues, even as we lead with theme-related articles.

The "Dragon Ecologies" department is indeed one of the more popular, according to the letters we've been reading. Thus, we plan on including plenty, but we hope you'll find them frequently amusing and inspiring. Check out Johnathan Richards's latest offering, a decidedly creepier installment than you might expect from the mind behind the Monster Hunters' Association.

the game dynamic and progressive for my roleplaying group. I truly think the game is long overdue for a 3rd edition.

Also, after reading some of the hints and specifics given in the FAQ, I think some of the changes are long overdue. For example, bonus spells for high Intelligence for wizards. This has been a house rule in my campaigns for as long as I can recall.

That being said, however, I do have several concerns. First off, I question the use of the GREYHAWK® campaign as the default setting. The GREYHAWK setting lost much of its allure early on for me.

The world never appealed to me. There were many reasonable characters developed but no passionately interesting characters. After only two or three years (I was 11 when I started playing this game), my gaming group created its own world called Palor. This world became a richly detailed setting. However, it was difficult to maintain a consistent campaign while also developing the setting. Imagine my surprise when I picked up the first FORGOTTEN REALMS® supplement.

Here was a world with unbelievable development, detail, excitement, and passion. There isn't a single character in any other campaign (home-grown or officially published) that can touch the seven sisters. Let me say for the record: Ed Greenwood is a genius!

Unfortunately, Wizards of the Coast has decided to support the GREYHAWK campaign as the default setting for 3rd Edition.

Now I am faced with the decision to use a world that I don't enjoy or else try to develop a world on my own. Please tell me that the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign will still be supported with additional supplements in the future! Don't force the GREYHAWK setting on me.

There is also a question regarding the novels produced by TSR. I own every novel produced for every setting. I especially love the FORGOTTEN REALMS novels. Will TSR continue to produce novels from this setting?

One last point I would like to make. I buy practically everything produced by Wizards of the Coast in a given year. (I know, it's a habit now instead of a hobby!) However, if FORGOTTEN REALMS is no longer going to be developed, it makes me wonder if Ed Greenwood's creative brilliance will grace future Wizards of the Coast products. If Wizards of the Coast is moving away from Ed Greenwood, I will have to move away from Wizards of the Coast.

I do have other concerns. (Will the PLANESCAPE® setting still exist? Talk about a setting with infinite potential. Whose idea was that?) However, these other concerns I can address on my own by using existing products, developing some things on my own, and implementing house rules. However, no house rule I can create will allow my tiny little mind to replace the wonders brought to us by Ed Greenwood. After all, I'm not Elminster!

Lee Perry
shade@wvadventures.net

After all, I'm not Elminster!

Let's see whether we can allay all of Lee's fears at once. Fortunately, it's easy this time.

While the GREYHAWK setting provides the backdrop to the 3rd Edition D&D game, it isn't taking the place of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign. In fact, there are big plans afoot for the Realms, and Ed Greenwood remains a big part of them. You can expect to see a steady supply of game products and novels from the land of the Seven Sisters. That's not to mention the "New Adventures of Volo," which begin in this very issue.

Those who want more of the GREYHAWK setting should keep an eye on POLYHEDRON® Newszine. While the plans aren't firm enough for announcements, it's safe to say the setting will enjoy lots of activity in the RPGA® Network. For more information, check out the website (**www.wizards.com**).

As for the PLANESCAPE setting, it will continue to exist as a part of the much more inclusive D&D world. This year, in fact, you can expect to see at least one or two significant jaunts to the planes in D&D adventures and supplements. The only difference now is that the planes aren't pigeonholed into their own setting—they're more a part of the D&D multiverse, as they were originally meant to be.

Whenever we see a great campaign article, we'll snap it up. Check out this issue's "Underspires" article, and look for a taste of the GREYHAWK® and AL-QADIM® settings very soon. In keeping with our "back to basics" philosophy, we'll try to keep all of the campaign-specific articles useful to everyone, even those who don't play in those worlds.

"Roleplaying Reviews" is gone for the forseeable future and perhaps forever. It's impossible for a paper magazine to compete with the speed of Web-published reviews these days, so we're focusing on material that remains useful for months or years rather than just a few weeks.

Symbols of Audaire

I have a few questions concerning "Van Richten's Legacy: The Cult of Simon Audaire" from issue #264.

1. Gerard Renier supposedly can cast the *ward against wererats* spell. This in itself is good, as it's practically necessary for any resistance movement in Richemulot. However, according to his description, Gerard has no access to the Wards sphere. Is this a granted power or was a minor access to this sphere unlisted in the article?

2. What sort of symbol does this cult use? (It seems that every religion in the D&D® game has a symbol that its priests use.) I suggest the Renier coat-of-arms with a scar across it to indicate they are working against that clan, or perhaps simply the Audaire coat of arms?

3. Are there any other priests in this cult aside from Gerard Renier? Perhaps there are a few 1st-level acolytes to assist him in services and to add to the level of power for teams on specific missions.

These are minor points, but they might add to the flavor of the cult. I realize some of these could be up to individual DMs, but I am interested in the official answers. Thank you very much.

Eric C. Daniel
Alexandria, VA

We turned to author James Wyatt to answer your questions and, more importantly, shoulder the blame!

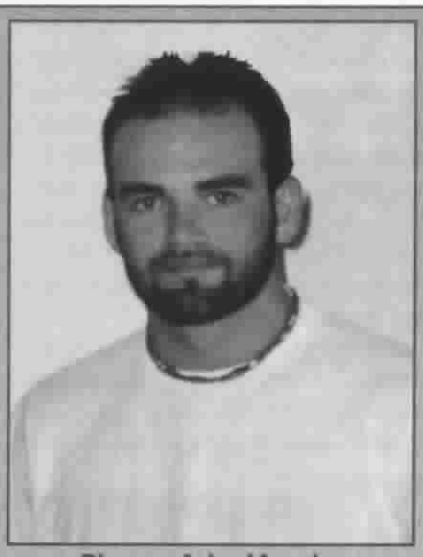
He writes:

"1. My mistake. Gerard should have minor access to the Wards sphere in addition to his other spheres.

"2. As a persecuted minority cult, the followers of Simon Audaire do not make physical holy symbols, as their discovery would be concrete evidence usable against them. Instead, they use signs and gestures to identify themselves to other members of the cult. The most common and simple of these identifying gestures is drawing a knife and pulling the flat of the blade across the back of the left hand.

"3. At this point, no other member of the cult has shown sufficient devotion to be rewarded with priestly powers (granted powers and spell ability). Gerard certainly has acolytes who assist him in the rites, but they are not members of the priest class. Some of them are formidable members of other character classes, however, and the day will probably not be long in coming when additional priests of the cult appear."

Player of the Month



Player of the Month: Travis Hawvermale

I knew I was in trouble when one of my players said, "When we return to the giants' lair, I bring along a sapling."

"A sapling?" I asked.

The roleplayer I'd like to nominate for player of the month is Travis Hawvermale, of Stillwater, Oklahoma. Travis is currently playing a halfling priest of Mother Earth. As soon as Travis picked up the sapling, I knew that the giants in the nearby steading were in for a long night. Travis's inventive halfling ended up planting the sapling in the center of the lair, knocked the roof out by *enlarging* the sapling, then, one *liveoak* spell later, a 12–Hit Die treant began making life difficult for the giant king.

Travis has been playing the various incarnations of the D&D® game since he was seven. Now twenty-three, his fifteen-year tenure has made Travis the John Elway of our campaign. Though he's just your ordinary skilled veteran for three and a half quarters of play, he polymorphs into a quasi-deity during the two-minute drill.

Take the shrapnel for instance.

The scene: The sixth and final level of the infamous tower of Zagyg, from the *Ruins of Greyhawk* module.

The situation: The characters have managed to invoke the ire of a demilich librarian and 240 (yes 240!) invisible stalkers. Pursued by the indefatigable demilich, harried by the stalkers, the characters run for their lives but can't find a ready escape.

While the paladin prays for a glorious death and the illusionist laments the fact that undead are immune to ninety percent of his spells, Travis calmly gathers several thousand missile beads that Zagyg left lying around and marches off to the room where the smoke powder is stored.

He packs the beads into the jars of powder. "Look guys, shrapnel!"

Twelve jars of *smokepowder*, each the equivalent of a sixteen-die *fireball*. On top of that, 2,700 beads, averaging a five-die *fireball* each.

How many experience points do you get for 240 invisible stalkers?

These are but two examples of how Travis always brings an air of excitement to the game, and excitement is what it's all about. Whenever he's at the table, there's always the chance for the extraordinary, always the possibility that the day will be won by fabulous ingenuity when strength alone cannot prevail. It is with tremendous respect that I nominate my brother, Travis Hawvermale, for *DRAGON® Magazine's's* Player of the Month.

—Lance Hawvermale

Ed-cellent Campaign

I have recently read the FAQ for the 3rd edition D&D® game on the TSR website (**www.3rdedition.com**), and I wanted to express my opinions.

I have been playing the D&D game (in its various configurations) for more than twenty years. In that time, I have seen many changes that have helped to make

Forum

Question of the Month

Respond to the Question of the Month or any other roleplaying topic by mailing "Forum," DRAGON® Magazine, ***1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA 98055, USA; dmail@wizards.com.*** Include your full name and mailing address; we won't print a letter sent anonymously. We'll withhold your name or print your full address if you wish.

WHAT LEVEL IS "HIGH LEVEL"? HOW HIGH IN LEVEL DO YOU LIKE YOUR PCS TO GO DURING A CAMPAIGN?

Truths Untold

In issue #263 you asked, "When is it all right for the DM to give blatantly false information to the players?" The answer is *never*. It is a matter of personal integrity.

The players are human beings. By that fact alone they deserve to be shown respect by honest communication. They are probably also your friends. If you like having friends, you don't lie to them.

Characters, on the other hand, must be lied to all the time. DMs lie in the traditional ways, the most common of which is the lie of omission. The DM says, "You see a long hall with a door at the end," not, "You see a long hall with a trap in the middle and a door at the end."

The second most common is the lie of commission. The DM says, "You see a man in the shadows beckoning you," not, "You see a demon, disguised as a man, lurking in the shadows, beckoning you."

Characters on the other hand, must be lied to all the time.

As a DM you lie to the characters all the time. It is a game tool, how the game is played, and what the players expect. But as a DM, you never lie to the players.

Bryan Cooper
Riverside, RI

Evil is as Evil Does

On the topic of playing evil characters ("Evil Rules!" from "DMail" in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #264), I would like to add a story from my own group.

The party consisted of a majority of evil characters, but none of them were chaotic evil. This eliminated the common problem of "lets go kill everything and take over the world." Don't be mistaken, world domination was their goal, but they just decided that it would be easier to conquer the world than to "earn" such rulership through good deeds.

The party was well roleplayed. For instance, we had a dwarven fighter that could have single-handedly taken out an entire army of skeletons, but he had a severe phobia of undead and cowered in the corner whenever there was a chance of undead appearing. They stayed true to their lawful evil alignments throughout the game. This worked well because, while each party member had a personal agenda, each also knew how to work as a team. It was the most against-the-book campaign I have ever run, but it was also one of the most fun.

This party built a castle and proceeded to perform all of the mundane political stuff that goes along with running a castle. They still managed to put an evil twist on it, though. While holding audience, they killed the first merchant to object to their taxes and used him as an example, but they were completely fair with everybody else who came in, including the party that was there to declare war on them—although they did try to poison, stab, beat, and generally kill the other party.

This just goes to show that a party of evil characters can work within the game. Granted, they won't be saving the princess out of the goodness of their hearts, but they would still save her in exchange for some sort of compensation, and they knew the value of a reputation, so they might have done it for free if for no other reason than the good public relations that it would show. So, evil does not mean unplayable; it just takes a more skilled party to pull it off. Who else could convince the bad guy that they are actually allies while sliding a knife into the villian's back? It's all about how you play it.

Jacob Schwartz
Reading, PA

Impractical Evil

Commenting on Matthew Avery's idea for evil characters, there is one way that evil does work: The evil characters must band together for a common purpose so strong that they would never mess with each other. Instead of roleplaying a group of chaotic evil characters messing with each other, try a less random group of lawful evil characters all heading towards a terrible goal. This works because everyone can be evil, but not to each other. The Empire in *Star Wars* exemplifies this kind of disciplined evil.

However, two things make this type of play difficult.

1. Most players who want to be evil, want to mess with their friends' characters. The lure of being evil for these roleplayers involves stealing things and causing havoc. These antics ultimately take the fun away from everyone else, and they just don't work.

2. To play a lawful evil campaign is to tread on dark territory. You must be serious about your evil. This isn't stealing your friend's purse or getting him drunk or leaving him in a tight spot. This is calculated evil, and most of us believe very strongly in not doing things like that.

In the end, evil campaigns are not practical. They often result in angering your friends, and the entire experience often turns negative. Playing evil characters just doesn't work.

However, as many many novels and stories and movies have depicted, that doesn't mean the good characters must be perfect. Take a greedy character like Han Solo for instance, a fan favorite in the movie genre; he was rough around the edges and pretty selfish at times, but he was still good.

Jason F. Smith
Address Withheld

Improving Ability Scores

There's been a lot of talk about things in the AD&D® system that need work, ranging from new skill systems to more fluid character design. However, there is one point most writers seem to miss entirely when they imagine the new vistas of advancement: Ability Scores.

Imagine a scrawny 20th-Century computer hacker. Suddenly, a war breaks out; he is drafted into the military and pushed through the rigors of boot camp and intensive exercise. He is flown out to the mountains, where he spends months climbing up and down rocky slopes carrying a full pack as a communications specialist for his unit, battling thick snow, high cliffs, and daily mountain climbs, as well as close-range battles with indigenous forces who prefer the tactic of springing into the group's midst and engaging them at ranges too close to safely use firearms.

At the end of his tour, he walks into a bar with his laptop for a drink while he works on a new script for his web page. A fight breaks out, so he picks up the offending biker in one hand and carries him out of the building with sheer physical might.

Now imagine an AD&D mage. He's casting cantrips to fetch his beer when a war breaks out. He is put through rigorous training and sent out with a full pack loaded down with components for exhausting combat magics, food for days on end, and a heavy tome of spells to carry up and down rocky inclines. He is thrust into hand-to-hand combat against attacking monsters. At the end of the war, the mage pants and puffs his way back home, still barely able to carry his pack as the other members of his unit whine, "What a wimp!"

The AD&D rules have always viewed stats as an absolute. They are monstrously difficult to raise, and they generally require massively powerful magic to improve.

While I don't have a perfect solution at the moment, I do have a stopgap measure to offer. Upon gaining a level, a player can choose one of the PC's primary statistics and roll to improve that statistic, with the modifiers shown below.

If the bonuses to improve the roll add up to more than the starting score, the statistic automatically improves by one, and a roll at –10 is made to improve the stat by a second point.

This system is hardly bullet-proof, and it hasn't been adequately tested, but it should alleviate the problem of being unable to improve oneself.

Justice McPherson
Palmer AK,
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Mod.	Applied if ...
–4	the Ability Score is a character's highest.
–2	no attempt was made to use the Ability Score in question during recent play.
–1 to –4	the character has either no intelligent idea how to improve the Attribute or has an awkward, unworkable plan. (For example, the forester tries to learn from the slimy, obnoxious, lecherous thief how to be more charismatic.)
–1 to –4	the player can't think of any logical reason why the PC should improve in that Ability.
–4 to –8	the reason for the low score has been described as something that can't be changed without powerful magic. For example, if the weak character is weak because he or she has a muscle-wasting disease or if the character has a poor appearance because of horrible facial scarring, even rigorous attempts to improve the attribute should suffer a large negative modifier.
+2	a need for the stat to be improved was made obvious over the course of the PC's adventures. For instance, a boorish fighter spent a lot of time bumbling around a court intrigue.
+4	the statistic has always been described as something easily remedied, such as the forester whose low Charisma springs from his poor hygiene and tattered clothing. Simply getting in the habit of bathing should produce a remarkable improvement.
+1 to +4	the PCs has good examples to imitate or train under. For instance, the scraggly forester tries to take lessons in hygiene from the group's fastidious enchantress, or the wimpy mage who tries to keep up with the barbarian's workout regime.
+1 to +4	the PC trains constantly and rigorously toward improving. A +1 bonus might mean describing how the character jogs a mile every morning and does push-ups and sit-ups, while a +4 bonus might describe a grueling, agonizing, miserable, fanatical 16 hour-a-day regimen of running, fighting, and heavy labor carrying 200 pounds of rocks, a diet of raw tofu and rice, as well as whatever other insanely overdone ideas the DM and players can imagine.

Miranda Horner

by Stephen Kenson

For this games editor, fun is the name of the game.

Roleplaying games editor Miranda Horner is having a great time, and she wants everyone to know it. "Working here is a whole lot of fun," she says. "Our passion for the work is tremendous, and it gives us a lot of energy. It's just a blast."

Miranda is an editor with the roleplaying games R&D group at Wizards of the Coast, working on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® and DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® games. She considers herself an example of what you can accomplish if you're willing to follow your dreams and do what you love.

Born in Waukegan, Illinois, Miranda was raised in Texas and moved to Kansas City shortly before attending college there. When she was growing up, she loved reading fantasy books, which led her to the ENDLESS QUEST® series of books from TSR, followed by Weis and Hickman's DRAGONLANCE Chronicles trilogy. "I also watched the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS cartoon religiously," she reports.

Her exposure to the stories of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS worlds led Miranda to an interest in roleplaying. Unfortunately, she was unable to find a gaming group that was looking for players. So she bought the basic AD&D® books, taught her cousins how to play over summer vacation, and played the D&D® computer games from SSI. "Until I moved to Kansas City, my gaming experience was fun but very sporadic."

When she started college, Miranda wanted to be an accountant. After a few classes in Accounting and other business subjects, she decided she liked History and English Literature better, and that she wanted to edit fantasy books. "Since TSR was so close to my grandparents' house in Illinois, I made it my goal to somehow get into TSR."

Miranda started attending the GEN CON® Game Fair and met a number of TSR people at the seminars. She also got a job working in a bookstore to help pay her college tuition. She set up game demos and ran a booth for the store at a local roleplaying convention, where she met her future husband, Shaun.

"He was in charge of finding a site for the convention, and the hotels kept asking him for a name, even though it didn't have one yet. So he told them it was called "ShaunCon." His friends thought it was so funny that it's been called that ever since." ShaunCon is still held in the Kansas City area, and Miranda and Shaun still attend every year.

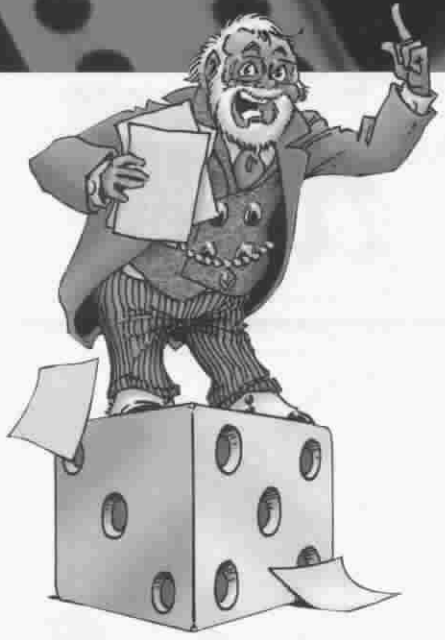
Miranda took an editing job with West End Games in 1994, shortly after she and Shaun were married, then joined TSR some eight months later. Since that time, Miranda edited a number of game books for TSR and has even tried her hand at writing. She has two published short stories, "Hanna's Tale" in the Rath & Storm anthology for **Magic: The Gathering®** game, and "Tree of Life" in the *Heroes & Fools* anthology for the DRAGONLANCE setting. Miranda edited a number of books for the DRAGONLANCE game line, including *The Bestiary*, one of her favorites. "I liked the stories. They really helped bring the creatures to life, and the art was just glorious. It all really came together in the end."

She says it's an editor's job to "refine a book and make it as good as it can be, so the reader gets the best possible experience out of it." She's quite proud of her editorial co-workers and the game designers she works with. "Part of the enjoyment I get out of my work is knowing the designer and the people I work with appreciate the effort that goes into each project."

Currently, Miranda works primarily on the D&D game line. Recently, she has been editing a new AD&D adventure by Bruce Cordell and Steve Miller. "I can't say much about it except that it's an epic adventure, featuring a mix of AD&D worlds and the return of some familiar faces. It's a lot of fun."

Miranda is also editor of the LEGENDS OF THE LANCE™ online newsletter, which features stories, interviews, and game articles about the DRAGONLANCE world. The newsletter looks for short articles useful to DRAGONLANCE players and Narrators with interesting stories behind them. "Either SAGA® or AD&D statistics are fine," Miranda says. "Including both is even better!" Miranda encourages budding writers to submit material for the newsletter to her at `gumdrop@wizards.com`. "It's a great way to get started and earn some experience," she says. Some LEGENDS OF THE LANCE writers have gone on to write for *DRAGON® Magazine*.

It's the opportunity to do something she really enjoys that drives Miranda's work at Wizards of the Coast. "The whole reason I'm doing what I'm doing is because I want to have fun with my life, and that's what I encourage other people to do. You can do what you really love. Don't lose sight of that. It can happen."



Calling All Fanboys!

By Gary Gygax

If you are as prone to irritation as I am when seeing or hearing the term "fanboy," this column should do your heart good. On the other hand, if you approve of the word, worse still use it, then run along and read something else, junior. Bad enough we need to suffer the slings and arrows of those who scorn gaming. To be bent on attacking fellow gamers—putting them down because they like a game or style of play that you don't—is absolutely unconscionable.

Fan is a suitable word often used to describe "an enthusiastic devotee" or an "ardent admirer" of something or someone. Years ago, I was a fan of Avalon Hill games, Tom Shaw (vice president of the company), and even Donald Featherstone (publisher of *Wargamer's Newsletter* in the UK). Overall, I am a game fan. As I ardently admire the writing of Jack Vance, I am his fan. It is safe to say that all of us are fans to some degree. Now to the offensive "fanboy."

The prefix, "fan," is a perfectly acceptable word. It describes most of us in some aspect. By adding the suffix, the real meaning of the word is destroyed, and together they convey something opprobrious.

We all understand the disparaging connotations of the word "boy." In its vilest implication it conveys lesser status, servility, and inferiority. When combined with "fan," the new word denotes someone who is servile to a thing or a person. Because someone is enthusiastic, a devotee, ardent in admiration, and evidences this, some twit can smugly refer to that person as a fanboy. The name-caller gains the approbation of his coterie of self-satisfied associates and wears the laurels of victory for identifying a gamer who by his or her standards is obsequious. They are devotees, better aficionados, but the object of the derisive epithet is a mere fanboy.

If you have been ridiculed by use of the appellation or even witnessed such an event, think back to the incident. More than likely the one named as a fanboy was espousing some popular game—the AD&D® game, for example. Perhaps it was some person, an author or game designer who was being championed. When the enthusiast ardently held his or her ground, the one assailing the championed thing or person pointed a virtual finger, uttered "fanboy."

Fanboy is a weak, petty little epithet made up by someone lacking fortitude and the courage of conviction.

This, of course, then served as high ground for the condescending twit, and standing upon it, he spoke down thereafter. No need to address actual facts, answer questions, or provide a cogent discourse. With the fact of the inferiority of his opponent established by the fanboy label, what need for actual debate? Thus the opinions and assertions of the name-caller were validated and established as the truth. The victim of the epithet must perforce slink away in abject humiliation or else be treated to worse verbal abuse.

What is taking place seems certainly to be that someone who feels inferior because he or she is in a minority position assumes an opposite mantle to cloak this feeling. Leaving aside the matter of whether there is any merit in numbers when judging the worth of a thing or a person, the very act of trickery conveys the weakness of the one so doing. Fanboy is a weak, petty little epithet made up by someone lacking fortitude and the courage of conviction. If one truly believes admiration for an object or person is justified, no reinforcement by others is needed, and those who hold differing opinions are not threatening.

All of this seems germane now. With the news of 3rd-Edition D&D® game releases coming soon, there will be much discussion, pro and con, regarding it. The small minority of vocal detractors of Wizards of the Coast, the game proper, and those who create its parts will be out in force. Some will aim at building themselves and what they do up by attempting to tear down what you advocate, and you personally. Count on fanboy being hurled about with considerable abandon.

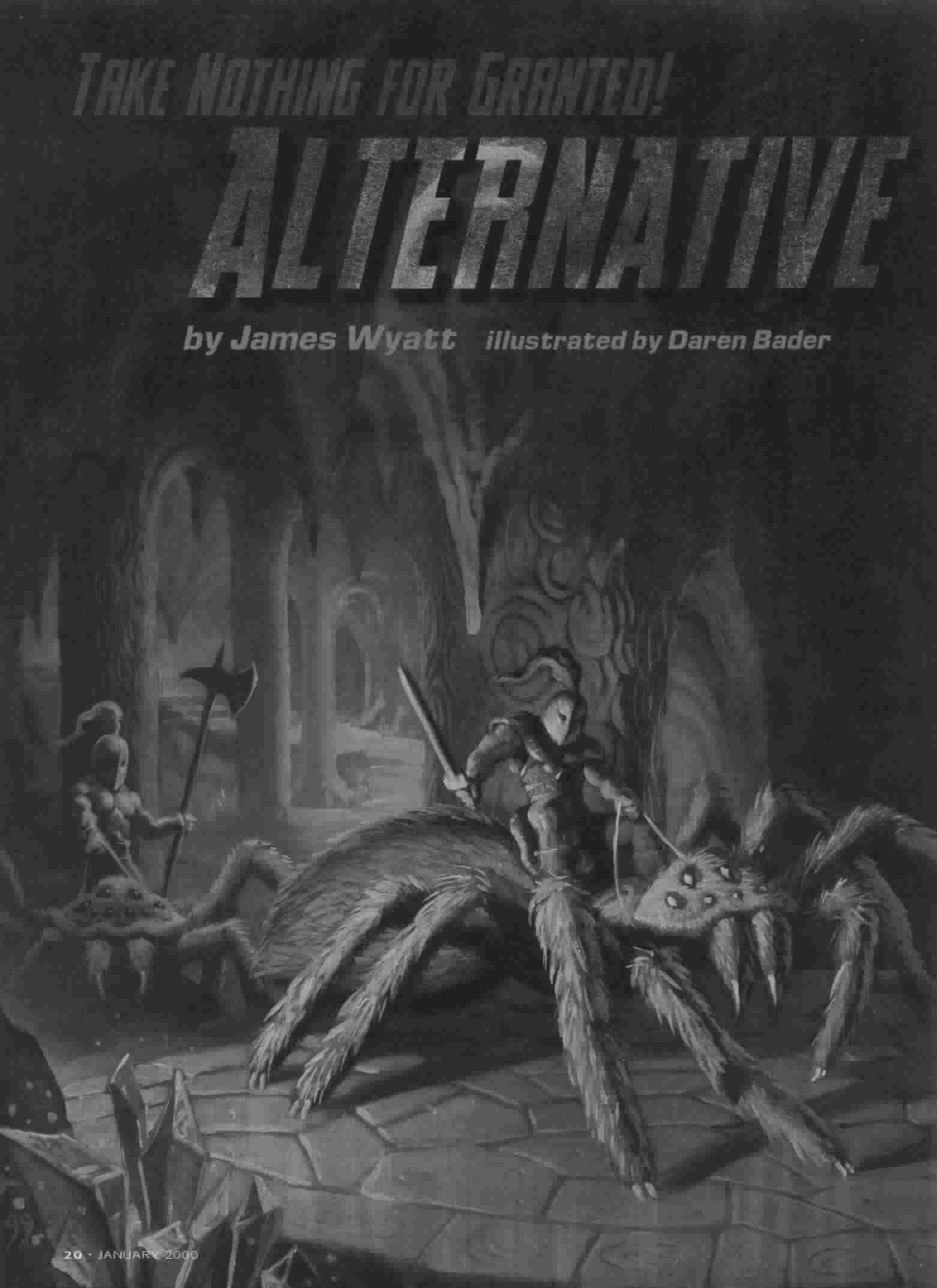
In truth, I have yet to observe anyone answer the epithet with a devastating counter. Merely returning some insult is unsatisfactory, as it brings one to the same level as the one calling names. Perhaps the best response is to shrug off the insult and point out that the one using it must lack reasoned argument to resort to name calling. There might even be some merit in embracing the term, making it a badge of honor rather than something opprobrious. That is what the American Revolutionists did with the epithet "Yankee." I'll accept the term in this sense: "fan" plus "boy" as in "fellow" or "person," one of the boys.

Hey! That's not bad. If D&D gamers are fanboys, then it means we are enthusiastically devoted to that game and associated in fellowship thus. Can't argue with that ...

TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED!

ALTERNATIVE

by James Wyatt illustrated by Daren Bader



UNDERDARKS

The AD&D® game presupposes a vast subterranean world that serves as home to such vile monsters as mind flayers, drow, and aboleth.

The origins of this Underdark are almost as old as the AD&D game itself. The "D" series of modules published in 1978 introduced the immense network of caverns underneath the GREYHAWK® campaign setting. *The Dungeoneer's Survival Guide* provided the most comprehensive overview of the Underdark up to that point, detailing an expansive underground region called Deepearth. *The Night Below* boxed set offered an entire campaign that's set in the Underdark.

> Tweak any of the assumed characteristics and the Underdark becomes a profoundly different place

In most AD&D game campaigns, the Underdark has several identifying characteristics. It is composed mostly of air-filled passages, though underground rivers, lakes, and even seas exist as well. These tunnels resemble natural caverns that exist on Earth: limestone or volcanic caves with features like sinkholes, stalactites, and stalagmites.

A number of fabulous races populate the Underdark, including the drow, duergar, myconids, derro, cloakers, mind flayers, jermlaine, aboleth, kuo-toa, and svirfneblin. Almost all of these races are evil, and legend tells that several of them (drow, duergar, and kuo-toa) fled underground in the aftermath of the ancient wars between the forces of light and darkness. The defeated cultures now live beneath the surface in an uneasy balance of power.

Tweak any of these assumed characteristics, however, and the Underdark becomes a profoundly different place. Imagine a subterranean empire ruled by duergar, where the other races of the Underdark are either extinct or enslaved. Picture an Underdark that is dominated not by evil races but by good ones—deep dwarves, svir-fneblin, and others. Suppose seawater fills an Underdark ruled by the aboleth and kuo-toa. For a taste of the truly fantastic, imagine an Underdark that bears absolutely no resemblance to earthly caverns, an alien or otherplanar environment that breaks all the rules. Challenging the presuppositions of the Underdark can result in a rich new environment for adventuring. It can even help you think in new ways about the surface of your campaign world.

A Duergar Empire

The traditional Underdark is inhabited by a number of civilized races—some native to the subterranean environment, some driven underground in the myth-shrouded past—co-existing in a relative balance, if not peace. In an alternate Underdark, however, one race might have upset the balance of power to dominate the subterranean world. Players might not be surprised by a drow or mind flayer empire, and these creatures have been detailed extensively (drow in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® supplements *Drow of the Underdark* and *Menzoberranzan*, and mind flayers in *The Illithiad* and its MONSTROUS ARCANA® adventures). A powerful empire of duergar, on the other hand, is more unusual.

Duergar make more complex and interesting opponents if their magical powers of enlargement and invisibility described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ book are replaced by the full complement of psionic powers detailed in *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. Psionically, the duergar are not the match of the illithids, but their powers are formidable nonetheless. Duergar of any class gain psionic powers as a psionicist of the same level.

The Environment

Massive construction projects mark the duergar empire. These gray dwarves expand natural caverns and finish them with elaborate carvings, the artistry equal to anything produced by hill or mountain dwarves. They smooth and pave tunnels to form roads patrolled by elite soldiers on steeder mounts. Aqueducts carry water from natural sources to remote strongholds. A standing army bearing magical weapons enforces harsh discipline upon subject states and slaves. The Underdark might contain civilizations, but it is not without its frontiers.

PCs daring to venture into even the frontier regions of the empire must be careful in their movements. Marching around in plain view as a well-armed party of surface-dwelling adventurers is foolhardy; the duergar quickly respond to such small-scale invasions with a powerful military force. PCs should disguise themselves as they would in a hostile city on the surface—trying to appear as slaves, most likely, and keeping weapons concealed.

The Powers

The duergar, naturally, are the dominant culture of this Underdark. Guided by the priests of Laduguer, the gray dwarves have a rigidly lawful society reminiscent of the Roman Empire at its worst: unbendingly hierarchical, with a large slave population supporting the luxury of the upper classes. Their slaves include drow, jermlaine, derro, and svirfneblin, as well as goblinoids, troglodytes, and other subterranean creatures found nearer the surface. In some regions of the surface, the duergar might have client states of humans or hill dwarves who send slaves into the Underdark as part of their tribute. Many duergar slaves are so degenerate after centuries of servitude that they have become members of a sub-race of their original stock.

Other major cultures of the traditional Underdark—myconids, cloakers, mind flayers, aboleth, and kuo-toa—might be extinct, or they might survive in small pockets. There could be tiny puppet states of any Underdark race within the borders of the duergar empire, but there is no question who is in control.

Duergar Empire Adventure Track

This outline suggests a possible course of events to introduce a group of PCs to the existence of the duergar empire.

- A band of raiders from a hill dwarf client state of the duergar empire raids a surface village and carries off several people. The PCs must track down the raiders and rescue the prisoners before their captors transport them into the Underdark for slavery. One of the captives could be a friend or relative of a PC; all of them are healthy adults capable of combat. If the rescue brings the PCs into the dwarven stronghold, they catch a glimpse of tall, gaunt dwarves who seem to be giving orders to the hill dwarven leaders.

- A bounty hunter comes after the PCs, hoping to collect the price that the local duergar duke has put on their heads. This bounty hunter is a highly skilled fighter/thief (a hill dwarf, duergar, or perhaps a drow thrall) who moves about only at night. He attempts to deliver the PCs to the duke alive, affording them a chance to escape while underground. If he fails, the PCs learn that they are wanted criminals in a mysterious subterranean empire.

- On this or another visit to the underground, the PCs have their first direct confrontation with duergar. The small group of merchants, slavers, and guards should be a close match for the PC party. The encounter can be a combat, or it could involve diplomacy and negotiation. In either case, it should give the PCs the opportunity to learn more about the duergar empire and its vassals.

- Slave raids on the surface increase in frequency and intensity until the PCs are forced underground to investigate (or perhaps to rescue more captives). Making their first venture into the Underdark proper through passages leading downward from the vassal hill dwarf stronghold, they soon discover a duergar trading post, a small settlement where most of this duchy's business with the surface world occurs. They trace the raids to a slave trader who boasts a contract from the ruler of this region of the empire. Eliminating him causes the raids on the surface to slow for a time.

- If the PCs kill the first slave trader, a new one soon moves to fill his place. The PCs can follow the trail of the royal contract deeper into the subterranean realm to discover that the duergar king is using the slaves as part of his effort to put down a rebellious pocket of drow thralls. In this volatile situation, the PCs could start a lucrative smuggling operation, running weapons to the drow rebels in exchange for mining product or other valuables of the Underdark. They might assist the drow in other ways or even help the duergar quash the rebellion and thereby reduce the demand for slaves.

The Other Denizens

The giant hunting spiders called steeders are common in an Underdark ruled by duergar, their traditional riders. Large and dangerous predators are scarce near duergar strongholds, as the dwarves have pushed them into the frontier. Otherwise, the creatures encountered in a duergar-dominated Underdark are the same as in a traditional Underdark.

Bastion of Good

The traditional Underdark is a haven for evil creatures driven below ground by their good, surface-dwelling counterparts. The svirfneblin are the only major Underdark culture that tends toward good alignment, and they are a small minority in most Underdarks. If the surface world is uninhabitable (covered in frozen methane, bathed in acidic rain, or overrun by ancient dragons), humanoid civilization might have developed underground, with good and evil races co-existing. Alternatively, the Underdark could be the refuge of good-aligned races in a world dominated by evil. Pursuing this latter option, the surface world might be overrun with drow, mind flayers, or something even worse. Perhaps the illithids have succeeded in their quest to exterminate the world's sun and taken over the darkened surface of the planet. Perhaps an interplanar gate has released a plague of fiends, driving throngs of refugees into subterranean havens. More than any other option, turning the Underdark into a refuge of good shapes the character of the surface world as well.

Bastion of Good Adventure Track

In a good-dominated Underdark, the point is not to lure the PCs *into* the Underdark but rather to lure them *out* into a surface world that could be even more horrific than the deepest reaches of a traditional subterranean realm. This outline presents one course of events building on the assumption that an evil race—fiends from a portal to the Abyss, in this example—has overrun the surface world. To the deep-dwellers, the surface world is a realm of legend; the inhabitants of the Underdark have forgotten that their ancestors ever lived under the sun. The tanar'ri, likewise, believe that they are the absolute masters of this world, not knowing that their humanoid slaves have distant cousins living deep underground. This epic campaign arc contains many unpleasant revelations for both groups.

- An interracial council, made up of the leaders of several Underdark communities, summons the PCs. A divine messenger, appearing to each of them, has revealed that great events are in store. To set them in motion, heroes must venture to the surface world and return with a box of sunlight. When released in the Underdark, this sunlight triggers the transformation of the world. The leaders have chosen the PCs to make a journey to the surface world, carrying a box lined with mirrors to carry the sunlight back to the depths.

- The PCs undertake their quest to the surface, encountering ever-increasing threats from the fiendish denizens of the surface as they progress upward. Initially, they could encounter tieflings and other minions of the tanar'ri that dominate the surface world. These minions are the PCs' first hint that the Underdark races have distant relatives still living on the surface world, though enslaved and corrupted by their fiendish masters. Dretch and rutterkin slaves, and finally a lesser tanar'ri...tanar'ri (a half-fiend cambion or alu-fiend), stand... in the way of their final goal. At last the PCs emerge into a surface world shrouded in night. Shortly thereafter, they witness their first sunrise. Capturing the sun's rays in their mirrored box, they hasten back into the Underdark to escape fiendish pursuit.

- When the PCs release the sunlight from the box, it rises to the top of the great chamber the leaders have chosen as a meeting place, affixing itself there like a tiny subterranean sun. Once it is settled there, bright beams fall from it to land on the PCs, bestowing minor magical talents on them and indicating that they are the chosen divine agents of the great change that is in the works.

- Newly awakened to the existence of mortals in the depths of the earth, the tanar'ri mount an expedition into the Underdark. As chosen divine champions, the PCs are expected to lead the defense of the Underdark races.

- After driving off the first wave of tanar'ri invaders, the PCs receive another divine messenger who charges them with a quest to seal the Abyssal portal through which the original fiendish invaders arrived and through which they still receive both life energy and reinforcements. The PCs are to place the borrowed sunlight that now shines on the ceiling of the great cavern back into the mirrored box, then throw the box through the portal, which is located within a great obsidian palace on the world's surface.

- Sealing the portal strikes the decisive blow against the tanar'ri, but the war is not over as long as they swarm over the surface. The war's climax comes as the PC heroes face a mighty tanar'ri lord and must drive his life force back into the Abyss.

Aquatic Adventure Track

A series of adventures involving air-breathing PCs in an aquatic Underdark should involve twin arcs of character development. At the same time PCs learn more about the Underdark environment and its denizens, they should gradually acquire the means to stay underwater longer and move about more freely. An interesting method of providing this magical technology to the PCs is to assume that an ancient human or elven empire, long vanished from the surface world, was well acquainted with the watery Underdark and developed many magical items to facilitate its exploration. The PCs' first incursion into the aquatic tunnels might have them using potions of water breathing for a quick mission in which they might uncover a ring of water breathing left behind by an ancient explorer who met an untimely end. As they venture deeper and face greater threats, they acquire more power not only by racking up experience points but also by overcoming the limitations of the underwater environment.

· The PCs are in a surface city that is experiencing problems with its sewers. Subtle clues suggest that the city is dealing with an almost stereotypical wererat infestation, but the truth is different. A group of kuo-toan monitors pursued an insane kuo-toan warrior into the city's sewers, which drain into a subterranean river connected to the endless waters of the Underdark. Thrilled by this new playground, the kuo-toa have been venturing to the surface on dark nights and spreading mayhem, careful to leave no witnesses. The PCs venturing into the city sewers offer the first opposition to these creatures, and the kuo-toa flee back to the watery Underdark—diving into a sewer line and swimming away—before the PCs kill them all.

· The city council remains concerned about the possibility that the fish-men might mount a large-scale invasion, so they commission the PCs to perform a reconnaissance mission into the water-filled tunnels. Paying a city alchemist an exorbitant sum, they provide the PCs with two potions of water breathing per character and send them back into the depths. Venturing back into the sewers and into the subterranean river, the PCs explore the twisting tunnels of a strange and foreign environment. Soon they stumble upon the ruins of a small outpost built by the ancient surface empire that once explored these depths. Originally half-filled with air, the subterranean chamber is now completely water-filled, covered with algae (some of it dangerous), and otherwise in extreme disrepair. There are dangerous fish in the place, but that threat is disorganized, and there is no sign of the kuo-toa. The duration of their potions restricts the PCs' exploration of this outpost, and they must return before they can survey it thoroughly. As the duration of the potions dwindles, a group of merrow or aquatic troglodytes catches the PCs in an ambush. The climactic battle takes on a frenzied tone as the PCs struggle to defeat their attackers and return to the sewers before the potions wear off.

· The PCs' report to the city council persuades the council members to shell out the money for another round of magical potions—or perhaps the PCs recover sufficient treasure from the ruins to finance the alchemist's work themselves. In any case, they should now have enough time to explore the ruins more carefully. Now the PCs find mosaics depicting conflicts between the ancient surface-dwellers and kuo-toa and see representations of aboleth. Most importantly, they find one magical item that helps their next expedition—a helm of underwater action or some other long-term breathing solution.

· Now armed with one good breathing device and enough gold to purchase their own potions—and possibly a spellcaster rising high enough in levels to provide some waterbreathing assistance as well—the PCs can venture deeper underground. This brings the PCs back into conflict with kuo-toa, as they come upon a small outlying settlement of the fish-men. The settlement is in a state of disorder, as the kuo-toa have just discovered that one of their number has been spying for the aboleth. The fish-men are nervous and paranoid when the PCs arrive. The scene dissolves into total chaos when a raiding party of skum, led by a young aboleth, descends upon the kuo-toan settlement. The PCs' goal is to stay alive, and their reward is a handful of ancient trophies prized by the kuo-toa as relics of their ancient war with the surface-dwellers, including a cloak of the manta ray and a pearl of the sirines.

· In future expeditions, with increasing power, the PCs face greater numbers of kuo-toa and the increasing threat of the aboleth. They discover more ruins from the ancient surface-dwellers who previously explored this Underdark, perhaps slaying many of the unfortunate descendants of those explorers—the skum slaves of the aboleth. The kuo-toan priest/thieves of Blibdoolpoolp and the savant aboleth disciples of the Blood Queen hope to use the PCs as pawns in their ongoing struggles against each other. This allows the PCs the opportunity to play the two races against each other or to try not to become entangled in the conflict.

· The climax of the campaign comes as the PCs locate a fantastic ruin left by the ancient explorers from the surface. The incredible magic that kept this sprawling subterranean complex air-filled still protects certain areas of the ruins. The ruins hold the promise of vast stores of knowledge as well as magical power, and the PCs have their work cut out for them. Unfortunately, the brewing war between the aboleth and the kuo-toa erupts with the ruins as a battlefield, and the PCs must negotiate around the massively destructive violence of the conflict while pursuing their own goals. The ruins might hold an ancient artifact (which could lead into a whole new campaign), a library holding a wealth of valuable historical information or other significant treasure.

The Environment

If good-aligned creatures dominate the Underdark, the physical environment is nearly unchanged. Light could be more common, as surface-dwelling creatures try to adapt the underground environment to their physical needs. Otherwise, the normal natural hazards remain in place in this alternate Underdark.

A shift in the balance of power might drastically alter the physical environment of the surface world, on the other hand. If illithids have extinguished the sun, the surface is cold and dark. If fiends have taken over, their outer-planar influence might warp the surface world, its landscapes growing increasingly similar to a lower plane.

The Powers

Of the traditionally dominant Underdark cultures, only svirfneblin can thrive in a good-dominated world. Myconids might co-exist with the good races in relative peace, while jermlaine continue to haunt the fringes of Underdark culture, nearly impossible to exterminate from their tunnels. The other races either do not exist at all, live in remote "wilderness" areas of the Underdark, or dominate the surface world in some form.

Other races and cultures fill this void. Deep dwarves (described in *The Complete Book of Dwarves* and *PLAYER'S OPTION®: Skills & Powers*) take the place of their duergar cousins. Consider a race of deep elves, related to the drow as deep dwarves are to duergar. Stout halflings or a unique halfling subrace (perhaps similar to the furchins described in *The Complete Book of Gnomes and Halflings*) might adapt to the deep subterranean world, while humans can make their homes in any environment.

The Other Denizens

As on the surface of most AD&D campaign worlds, good-aligned civilized races try to keep predatory monsters from encroaching on their cities and villages. Away from civilization, of course, the normal range of Underdark creatures continues to thrive.

In a world so polarized along alignment lines, aasimon and other creatures of the Upper Planes might throw in their lot with the beleaguered good races of the Underdark, and aasimar (descendants of celestials and mortals) could be common. If fiends have overrun the surface world, tieflings (descendants of mortals and fiends) might exist in both camps.

An Aquatic Underdark

Particularly appropriate for a world covered mostly in oceans, this Underdark is mostly filled with water. There is still a vast network of caverns and tunnels, but only a few near the surface contain any breathable air. The watery tunnels present a completely alien environment to surface-dwellers, and even aquatic creatures accustomed to the open ocean are bewildered by the confined spaces of an aquatic Underdark.

The Environment

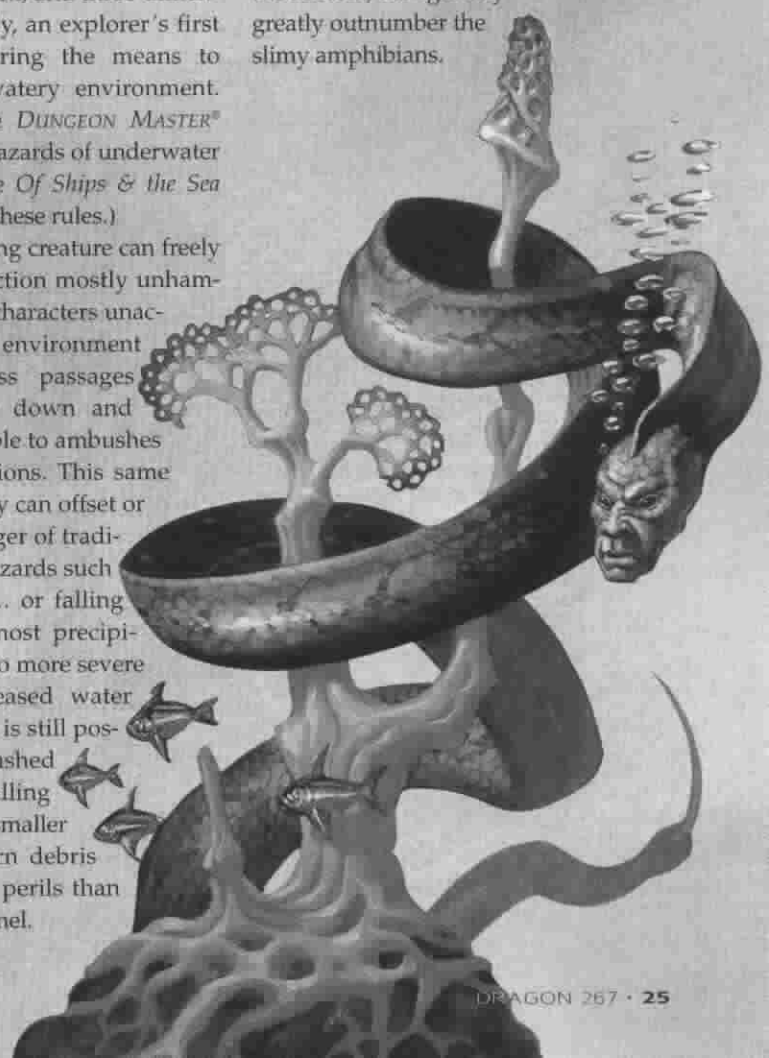
Exploring an aquatic Underdark combines the environmental hazards of traditional underground adventuring—darkness, cave-ins, claustrophobia, and hostile inhabitants—with the challenges of underwater exploration—breathing, visibility, movement, and three-dimensionality. Naturally, an explorer's first concern is acquiring the means to breathe in the watery environment. Chapter 9 of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* details the hazards of underwater adventuring. (The *Of Ships & the Sea accessory* expands these rules.)

Since a swimming creature can freely move in any direction mostly unhampered by gravity, characters unaccustomed to the environment might often miss passages extending up or down and could be susceptible to ambushes from these directions. This same negation of gravity can offset or eliminate the danger of traditional dungeon hazards such as falling rocks ... or falling characters. The most precipitous drops offer no more severe threat than increased water pressure. While it is still possible to be crushed under tons of falling rock in a cave-in, smaller amounts of cavern debris offer less serious perils than in an air-filled tunnel.

Perhaps the greatest danger facing characters who explore too deeply in an aquatic Underdark is water pressure. Humans have difficulty functioning at depths greater than 400 feet, while traditional Underdark caverns can extend dozens of miles underground. Even the deepest ocean-dwelling creatures, the eel-like anguillians, cannot survive at depths greater than 3,700 feet. An aquatic Underdark is necessarily shallower than a traditional Underdark, and most PCs need magical protection to explore the depths of this Underdark.

The Powers

While aboleth and kuo-toa are on the losing end of competition with drow, duergar, and the like on most worlds, they are the undisputed masters of an aquatic Underdark. Aboleth cities float in the deepest subterranean seas, but smaller outposts infest caverns closer to the surface as well, competing for domination with the kuo-toa. Kuo-toa in an aquatic Underdark are less prone to insanity but still too chaotic to form an organized threat to the surface world or the aboleth, though they greatly outnumber the slimy amphibians.



Alien Adventure Track

A campaign revolving around an alien Underdark involves themes of madness, nightmare, and unspeakable evil. Using the rules for Fear, Horror, and Madness checks from the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting can help to maintain this atmosphere. Consider making extensive use of the rules for dreams and nightmares in the RAVENLOFT boxed set *The Nightmare Lands*. In this outline, the PCs make their first excursions underground in their nightmares. In fact, the PCs' dream selves can enter the utterly alien world that lies at the core of the real world, while their physical bodies would not withstand its corrupting influence. Their minds might not survive the experience, however....

· While the PCs are in the middle of an overland journey, camped in the wilderness in some rugged terrain, they all experience a shared nightmare during their sleep one night. In the nightmare, the party is journeying together underground, fighting alien horrors and crossing weird terrains. The PCs find their actions slow and ineffective against the enemies they confront, and it is possible that injury or death in the dreams can result in real damage to the dreaming character. In the final scene of the nightmare, the PCs come to a ledge overlooking a huge cavern. Strange spires and bizarre structures fill the cavern, arrayed around a bubbling fissure in the center, almost like a volcanic opening. Instead of lava spewing from the fissure, however, gobs of protoplasm, eyes, mouths, lights and energies, winged fungi, and other manifestations of the deep realm erupt from the gaping hole and sink back in. Standing in a circle around this monstrous aperture are dozens of illithids who seem to be summoning or channeling the energies in some way. As the illithids, in unison, raise their heads to look toward the intruding PC dreamers, each character is overwhelmed with the sudden knowledge that the illithids plan to channel the force of the deep-realm energies to engulf and transform the surface world. In the dream, the PCs feel themselves fly straight up through the earth, pursued by an almost physical blast of deadly psionic energy, to reunite with their sleeping bodies and awake.

· If the PCs continue their journey, they come to a town within another day's travel. The townspeople speak in hushed whispers of strange nightmares and stranger occurrences in the area, particularly in the nearby foothills around an old abandoned mine. If the PCs explore the mine, they find themselves reliving much of their nightmare. The alien tunnels below the abandoned mine cleave a little more closely to the reality of the waking world, but still warp the PCs' sense of space and time. Here, the PCs' minds do not conspire against them as in the nightmare, but the damage they suffer in combat spills real blood. While in many cases their real experience diverges from the nightmare, at other times they see evidence that suggests their dream was real—some physical sign of their earlier passing like a mark scrawled on a wall, blood spilled by a dying character, or a burned-out torch left behind. Any attempt to sleep within the tunnels brings only more vivid nightmares.

· The nightmare that lasted only a night for the PCs' dream selves lasts weeks for the PCs in their physical forms as they descend deep into the earth and, simultaneously, into the mouth of madness. Eventually, they arrive on the ledge overlooking the great cavern, just as in the dream. They must find a way to halt the illithids' monstrous machinations and save the surface world from immersion in the substance of insanity. A clever combination of magic and physical force results in the mind flayers plummeting into the fissure and total annihilation.

· As the PCs begin the tortuous journey back toward the surface (and sanity), they continue to experience a plague of nightmares. Now, however, their dream selves follow the mind flayers into the pit, threatening the PCs with utter madness as they experience a realm that was never meant for human contemplation. The nightmares begin to fade as the PCs get closer to the surface, but recur occasionally for months afterward—as a new danger begins to appear in the dreams, slowly rising toward the fissure in the great cavern....

The other cultures of a traditional Underdark—drow, duergar, myconids, derro, cloakers, mind flayers, jermlaine, and svirfneblin—either do not exist at all, or they live only in isolated air-filled pockets. There might be additional major races: aquatic dark elves or squid-like variants of the mind flayer.

The Other Denizens

Other monsters likely to be found in these water-filled tunnels include mottled worms, vodyanoi, kopoacinth (gargoyles), morkoth, dragon turtles, sea snakes, giant squid and kraken, crystal ooze, water nagas, scrags (trolls) and merrow (ogres), and aquatic undead such as lacedons (ghouls) and sea zombies. In addition, aquatic varieties of traditional subterranean races such as troglodytes and carrion crawlers exist in this strange environment. Some algae have powers similar to those of terrestrial fungi and molds, and some unique varieties of fish and crustaceans resemble normal sea creatures.

An Alien Underdark

What lies in the deepest reaches of the underground might not have anything to do with caves and tunnels. The D&D® *Hollow World* setting proposes a whole new world located within the crust of the surface world. Perhaps the subterranean world is literally the abode of the dead, as in classical Greek mythology. Alternatively, the deep tunnels of underearth could open into a totally alien world—such as the Far Realm mentioned in *The Gates of Firestorm Peak* and *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual 4*. Instead of a trans-dimensional gate connecting the mundane world with the Far Realm, this bizarre domain sits inside the mundane world like the seed of madness inside every rational mind.

An Underdark such as this has an impact on the surface world, though surface dwellers mostly experience its influence indirectly. The inhabitants of

the surface world are unusually hot-tempered and prone to insanity. Weirdly deformed children are born all too often; what becomes of these children depends on the society in which they are born. Alienist wizards (as described in *Player's Option: Spells & Magic*) are common, perhaps even the only form of wizards on this world.

The Environment

The uppermost subterranean layers of this world are similar to those on any other world—tunnels and caverns of natural origin wend their way toward the depths of the earth. These caves form a boundary region between the ordinary world and the realm of madness below them, extending perhaps a mile under the surface. The proximity of the other world that lies below warps the caverns and tunnels of this boundary region. Those who venture even 100 feet underground risk insanity—plagued by nightmares, prone to mood swings and fits of temper, even physically altered by the influence of the twisted nether world.

Beyond this shallow boundary region, the ordinary caverns of limestone and lava simply dissolve into the alien realm below. This realm has no form. The constraints of space and time are irrelevant there. Surface-dwellers who actually enter this realm go irrevocably insane, becoming mindless, catatonic husks while the hostile atmosphere of the place dissolves their bodies.

The Powers

Many of the traditional Underdark races inhabit the twisted boundary region between the sane surface world and the realm of madness in the deeps, but no race is unchanged by its proximity to this place. Jermlaine and svirfneblin do not exist in this alternate Underdark, while drow and duergar are significantly changed, showing physical mutations and characteristics similar to troll mutates. (See *Monstrous Compendium Annual 4*.) The other Underdark races—myconids, derro, cloakers, illithids, aboleth, and kuo-toa—are already creatures of madness and are little changed by their proximity to the deep realm. However, any encounter with these creatures should emphasize their alien natures and bizarre characteristics—players might think they are dealing with a new race even when they are not.

The Other Denizens

Creatures native to the deep realm of madness (most described in *Monstrous Compendium Annual 4*) include the bloodsipper, dharculus, brood gibberling (and their gibberling progeny), gibbering mouther (from *Monstrous Compendium Annual 1*), neh-thalggu, and wyste. Other alien life forms—strange moss-like growths, tiny tentacled things, flapping batlike plants, and countless others—often roam into the natural caverns of the boundary region. These creatures live in an ecosystem completely alien to that of the surface world and defy classification. Also, common subterranean creatures like trolls or troglodytes might exist in mutated forms in the twisted caverns of this alien Underdark. (See troll mutates in *Monstrous Compendium Annual 4*.)

More Tweaking

Use the ideas presented in the *World Builder's Guidebook* and "With a Twist" in *Dragon® Magazine* #253 to make each Underdark race—horrible mind flayers or benevolent deep elves—unique both physically and culturally. Perhaps the duergar empire more closely resembles medieval Japan than ancient Rome, while the dominant kuo-toa of an aquatic Underdark command marids and wield unusual elemental magic thanks to their proximity to an elemental vortex. Even a traditional Underdark leads to new experiences if the drow have lost all remnants of their once-glorious civilization and have reverted to barbarism, or the mind flayers have mastered Athas' psionic enchantments.

The bumper-sticker aphorism about questioning reality is a good cardinal rule for world and campaign design. It is the quirks and oddities of a world, the things that are different from the norm, that players remember for years.

James Wyatt spends so much time at his computer, often late at night, that he might as well be in the Underdark.

COUNTDOWN

The New and Improved Cleric

Woe to the last player to roll up a character!

Everyone wants to have a cleric in the party, but almost no one wants to serve as the walking first-aid station.

The situation improved somewhat with the introduction of specialty clerics in 2nd Edition, but clerics remained the least popular of the classes. Fortunately, playing a cleric gets a lot better with the new edition of the D&D® game.

We talked with designers Jonathan Tweet and Skip Williams, and editor Julia Martin, to learn how they plan to make clerics more players' first choice.

"Spheres just don't work the way they used to."
—Jonathan Tweet

The New Cleric

Clerics in the 3rd Edition game have, according to Jonathan, "better spells, higher-level spells, better combat capability, a more solid spell list, and more balance among clerics of different types." More to the point, they aren't just about healing anymore.

Thanks to a deceptively simple new rules mechanic, clerics have a much wider practical spell selection. Rather than prepare healing spells in advance, clerics can "swap out" other prepared spells to cast healing spells in a process called "spontaneous casting." Better yet, the new edition provides a wider range of healing spells at lower levels. For instance, by expending a prepared 3rd-level spell, a cleric can spontaneously heal 3d8 plus his or her level in hit points, to a maximum of 3d8 + 15 points of healing.

"But watch out," cautions Jonathan, "evil clerics can spontaneously cast spells that cause wounds instead of heal them."

Spells & Granted Powers

How are spheres defined in 3rd Edition? First of all, they aren't spheres anymore. They are now known as "domains," and they're much more specific than in earlier editions.

"A domain is nine spells," explains Jonathan, "one of each level from 1st to 9th, each of which relates to the domain's overall theme—plus a granted power."

"Each domain provides a granted power plus access to a 'domain spell' at each spell level. For each level of spells, a cleric can prepare one additional spell per day, which can come from either of the cleric's two domains. Thus, each cleric has two granted powers (in addition to turning undead), and a 1st-level cleric gets one extra 1st-level spell per day (from either domain). When that cleric can cast 2nd-level spells, he or she gains access to two more domain spells, a 2nd-level spell from each domain."

Healing in 3rd Edition

One of the oddities of earlier editions of the D&D game was that it took high-level characters much longer to gain complete healing. Fortunately, healing is more robust in 3rd Edition. The healing spells now restore more hit points when cast by higher-level clerics, and characters regain their level in hit points per day of rest. Thus, a 4th-level warrior gains 4 hit points for a single day's rest, even without help from a cleric.

Like clerics, druids have access to spells from levels 0–9, but they have no bonus spells or granted powers from domains. Instead, they have a wide array of special abilities that veteran players will find familiar.

TO THIRD EDITION

11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In earlier editions of the game, clerics were limited to 7th-level spells. With 3rd Edition, the list now goes all the way up to 9th level—and all the way down to 0-level "orisons." While the design team has reorganized spells to more appropriate levels, thus "smoothing out" the spell progression, 9th-level cleric spells are still more powerful than old 7th-level cleric spells. Considering that undead turning continues to improve after 14th level, clerics have a lot to look forward to at high levels.

"Clerics, more than ever before, combine good defensive and combat abilities with great spellcasting abilities."
—Skip Williams

Combat

The old blunt-weapon rule is a thing of the past. Weapons in the 3rd Edition game fall into broader categories such as "simple weapons" and "martial weapons." Clerics usually do not have access to martial weapons, but they can take a heroic feat to gain proficiency in a single martial weapon. And while all deities have favored weapons, their clerics needn't use the same weapons—though most do, as a point of pride.

No matter which weapons the cleric chooses, he or she gains additional attacks starting at 8th level, making the class even more formidable in melee.

Turning Undead

Any cleric of a good deity, any good cleric of a neutral deity, or any good-leaning neutral cleric of a neutral deity may try to turn the undead. To do so, the cleric rolls 1d20 and adds his or her Charisma bonus. The result of that roll determines whether the cleric can turn undead of the target creature's Hit Dice. A good roll can turn undead up to 4 Hit Dice more powerful than the cleric, while a poor roll might affect only undead with 4 Hit Dice fewer than the cleric.

Clerics can attempt to turn undead more than once in an encounter, but their turning attempts are limited to 3 plus their Charisma bonuses per day—unless, as is possible with many abilities, they increase it with a heroic feat.

Why Play a 3rd Edition Cleric?

- Convert prepared spells to healing magic
- Better spells
- Great saving throws
- Multiple attacks at higher levels
- Fewer weapon restrictions

The Gods

Instead of referring to vague concepts of fantasy deities, the 3rd Edition rules give specific examples from the GREYHAWK® setting. The idea isn't to lock people into the GREYHAWK campaign but to provide a baseline from which all new D&D players can start together. This way, a player can have a completely defined cleric before the game begins, and everyone knows from the start that Moradin is the god of the dwarves in the core game.

Incorporating these gods into your own campaign is easy, but DMs are encouraged to devise their own pantheons or use those of other popular settings, like the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign. The purpose of the GREYHAWK gods is simply to give everyone the same starting point.

Join us next month, when we take a look at the new face of wizards in the 3rd Edition game.

The Gods of 3rd Edition

Deity	Alignment	Domains
Heironeous, God of Valor	Lawful good	Good, Law, War
Moradin, God of Dwarves	Lawful good	Earth, Good, Law, Protection
Yondalla, Goddess of Halflings	Lawful good	Good, Law, Protection
Ehlonna, Goddess of the Woodlands	Neutral good	Animal, Good, Plant, Sun
Garl Glittergold, God of Gnomes	Neutral good	Good, Protection, Trickery
Pelor, God of the Sun	Neutral good	Good, Healing, Strength, Sun
Corellon Larethian, God of the Elves	Chaotic good	Chaos, Good, Protection, War
Kord, God of Strength	Chaotic good	Chaos, Good, Luck, Strength
Wee Jas, Goddess of Death and Magic	Lawful neutral	Death, Law, Magic
St. Cuthbert, God of Retribution	Lawful neutral	Law, Strength, Protection, Destruction
Boccob, God of Magic	Neutral	Knowledge, Magic, Trickery
Fharlanghn, God of Roads	Neutral	Luck, Protection, Travel
Obad-Hai, God of Nature	Neutral	Air, Animal, Earth, Fire, Plant, Water
Olidammara, God of Thieves	Chaotic neutral	Chaos, Luck, Trickery
Hextor, God of Tyranny	Lawful evil	Destruction, Evil, Law, War
Nerull, God of Death	Neutral evil	Death, Evil, Trickery
Vecna, God of Secrets	Neutral evil	Evil, Knowledge, Magic
Erythnul, God of Slaughter	Chaotic evil	Chaos, Evil, Trickery, War
Gruumsh, God of Orcs	Chaotic evil	Chaos, Evil, War

By Any Other Name

THE DROW

Owen K.C. Stephens

Humans are warned that drow names do not necessarily denote beings of the same sex as similar names (and name endings) in human societies.
—The Drow of the Underdark

One of the most common problems in fantasy gaming is naming nonhuman characters. It's difficult to come up with names that are both odd enough to be appropriate for characters from an inhuman society and similar enough to one another to be believable. This is especially true for races popular as player characters, since each PC's name is likely to be used for a long time.

Yet without appropriate names, nonhuman characters often don't seem like creatures with a unique society and world-view. This is especially true for an enigmatic and secretive race such as the drow. For the members of this largely evil race to be believable, it is important that their names represent and reflect their culture's attitudes and philosophies.

The drow name generator below has been presented to assist with this intimidating task. Although it cannot even begin to represent all of the possible names for a race as ancient as the drow, this list can serve as a starting point and reference to create a consistent list of names. Further notes on drow culture and language can be found in *The Drow of the Underdark*.

Owen's wife warns us that he's working on twenty more name articles, including Neo-Otyugh Neo-Names, 101 Things to Call Your Pet Roc, *and* Names of the Flumphs. *Anyone who knows a flumph willing to discuss their nomenclature can reach Owen at OStephens@aol.com.*

How It Works

Each drow name consists of a prefix (from **Table 2**) and one or more suffixes (from **Table 3**). Since female and male drow names are often very different, many table entries list a female name fragment and then the male equivalent. Although the names might not seem particularly gender specific to an outsider, any drow will be able to tell the difference immediately. Rarely, a female drow might take part of a purely masculine name. However, any male who uses a solely feminine name fragment would be considered a rogue or troublemaker.

You can randomly generate a drow name by rolling on **Table 1**. Definitions have been included in these tables to help determine what a name means once it has been generated. If you prefer, it is also possible to pick a set of definitions you like and assemble a name that matches them. If your character is a powerful priestess of Lolth, you might decide her name should reflect this. Looking at the definitions, you decide her name will mean "Spell Weaver." This results in the name "Instra." For a man, the name would be "Sorntran."

Keep in mind that drow names frequently sound odd to human ears and might be difficult for humans to pronounce. If you really don't like a particular combination, try adding one or more letters or an apostrophe between the name fragments. Although not every combination of prefixes and suffixes will sound right, usually only a minor change is called for. If you can't make a particular name work, try one with a similar meaning. If you didn't like "Instra," try a name that means "Web Priestess" instead.

If you have randomly generated a name and don't like its definition, try altering the order of the words. It is also possible to use the definition as a starting place for a name's meaning. Often the definitions can be combined in a poetic way for better results. In the case of a three-fragment name, try dropping one or more of the definitions.

Thus "Halicedril" could mean "The Spider-Taken Warrior," "Deft Knight," "Nimble Warrior," or just "The Spider Taken." Don't worry about two names sharing the same meaning or having two definitions for one name. Two names might sound the same to a human, but a drow would know the difference.

Although some drow have a surname that denotes what family they are descended from or to which guilds they owe loyalty, noble drow and titled commoners can use the name of their noble house, clan, or trading house as a surname. Those drow are free renegades, owing allegiance to no one, sometimes keeping their house name as a reminder of where they came from and what they've escaped. A house name can be assembled from **Tables 4** and **5**, either by choosing a definition or by rolling once on each.

Table 1 (Roll 1d10)

1d10	Result
1–3	Roll once on **Table 2** and once on **Table 3.**
4–5	Roll once on **Table 2** and twice on **Table 3.**
6–7	Roll once on **Table 2,** once on **Table 3,** add an apostrophe, then roll again on **Table 3.**
8–9	Roll once on **Table 2** and once on **Table 3** for a first name, then roll on **Table 1** again for a second name.
10	Roll once on **Table 3,** add an apostrophe, then roll once on **Table 2** and once on **Table 3.**

Table 2: Drow Names Prefixes

1d100	Prefix (F/M)	Meaning
1	Akor/Alak	Beloved, best, first
2	Alaun/Alton	Lightning, powerful
3	Aly/Kel	Legendary, singing, song
4	Ang/Adin	Beast, monstrous, savage
5	Ardul/Amal	Blessed, divine, godly
6	Aun/Ant	Crypt, dead, deadly, death
7	Bae/Bar	Fate, fated, luck, lucky
8	Bal/Bel	Burned, burning, fire, flame
9	Belar/Bruh	Arrow, lance, pierced
10	Briz/Berg	Graceful, fluid, water, wet
11	Bur/Bhin	Craft, crafty, sly
12	Chal/Chasz	Earth, stable
13	Char/Kron	Sick, venom, venomed
14	Chess/Cal	Noble, lady/lord
15	Dhaun	Infested, plague
16	Dil/Dur	Cold, ice, still
17	Dirz/Div	Dream, dreaming, fantasy
18	Dris/Riz	Ash, dawn, east, eastern
19	Eclav/Elk	Chaos, mad, madness
20	Elvan/Kalan	Elf, elven, far, lost
21	Elv/Elaug	Drow, mage, power
22	Erel/Rhyl	Eye, moon, spy
23	Ethe/Erth	Mithril, resolute
24	Faer/Selds	Oath, sworn, vow
25	Felyn/Fil	Pale, thin, weak, white
26	Filf/Phar	Dwarf, dwarven, treacherous
27	Gauss/Orgoll	Dread, fear, feared, vile
28	G'eld	Friend, spider
29	Ghuan	Accursed, curse, unlucky
30	Gin/Din	Berserk, berserker, orc, wild
31	Grey/Gul	Ghost, pale, unliving
32	Hael/Hatch	Marked, trail, way
33	Hal/Sol	Deft, nimble, spider
34	Houn/Rik	Magic, ring, staff
35	Iliv/Dip	Liege, war, warrior
36	Ilm	Life, living, spirit, soul
37	Illiam/Im	Devoted, heart, love
38	In/Sorn	Enchanted, spell
39	Ilph	Emerald, green, lush, tree
40	Irae/Ilzt	Arcane, mystic, wizard
41	Irr/Izz	Hidden, mask, masked
42	Iym/Ist	Endless, immortal
43	Jhan/Duag	Shield, warded
44	Jhael/Gel	Ambitious, clan, kin, family
45	Jhul/Jar	Charmed, rune, symbol
46	Jys/Driz	Hard, steel, unyielding
47	Lael/Llt	Iron, west, western
48	Lar/Les	Binding, bound, law, lawful
49	LiNeer/Mourn	Legend, legendary, mythical
50	Lird/Ryld	Brand, branded, owned, slave
51	Lua/Lyme	Bright, crystal, light
52	Mal/Malag	Mystery, secret
53	May/Mas	Beautiful, beauty, silver
54	Micar	Lost, poison, widow
55	Min/Ran	Lesser, minor, second
56	Mol/Go	Blue, storm, thunder, wind
57	Myr/Nym	Lost, skeleton, skull
58	Nath/Mer	Doom, doomed, fate
59	Ned/Nad	Cunning, genius, mind, thought
60	Nhil/Nal	Fear, horrible, horror, outraged
61	Neer	Core, root, strong
62	Null/Nil	Sad, tear, weeping
63	Olor/Omar	Skin, tattoo, tattooed
64	Pellan/Relon	North, platinum, wind
65	Phaer/Vorn	Honor, honored
66	Phyr/Phyx	Bless, blessed, blessing
67	Qualn/Quil	Mighty, ocean, sea
68	Quar	Aged, eternal, time
69	Quav/Quev	Charmed, docile, friend
70	Qil/Quil	Foe, goblin, slave
71	Rauv/Welv	Cave, rock, stone
72	Ril/Ryl	Foretold, omen
73	Sabal/Szor	Amber, yellow
74	Sab/Tsab	Abyss, empty, void
75	Shi'n/Kren	Fool, foolish, young
76	Shri/Ssz	Silk, silent
77	Shur/Shar	Dagger, edge, stiletto
78	Shynt	Invisible, skilled, unseen
79	Sin/Szin	Festival, joy, pleasure
80	Ssap/Tath	Blue, midnight, night
81	Susp/Spir	Learned, skilled, wise
82	Talab/Tluth	Burn, burning, fire
83	Tal/Tar	Love, pain, wound, wounded
84	Triel/Taz	Bat, winged
85	T'riss/Teb	Blade, sharp, sword
86	Ulviir/Uhls	Gold, golden, treasure
87	Umrae/Hurz	Faith, faithful, true
88	Vas/Vesz	Blood, body, flesh
89	Vic	Abyss, deep, profound
90	Vier/Val	Black, dark, darkness
91	Vlon/Wod	Bold, hero, heroic
92	Waer/Wehl	Deep, hidden, south, southern
93	Wuyon/Wruz	Humble, third, trivial
94	Xull/Url	Blooded, crimson, ruby
95	Xun	Demon, fiend, fiendish
96	Yas/Yaz	Riddle, spinning, thread, web
97	Zar/Zakn	Dusk, haunted, shadow
98	Zebey/Zek	Dragon, lithe, rage, wyrm
99	Zes/Zsz	Ancient, elder, respected
100	Ziiv/Vuz	Forgotten, old, unknown

Table 3: Drow Name Suffixes

1d100	Suffix (F/M)	Meaning
1	-a/-agh	Breaker, destruction, end, omega
2	-ace/-as	Savant, scholar, wizard
3	-ae/-aun	Dance, dancer, life, player
4	-aere/-d	Blood, blood of, heir
5	-afae/-afein	Bane, executioner, slayer
6	-afay/-aufein	Eyes, eyes of, seeress/seer
7	-ala/-launim	Healer, priestess/priest
8	-anna/-erin	Advisor, counselor to
9	-arra/-atar	Queen/prince, queen of/prince of
10	-aste	Bearer, keeper, slaver
11	-avin/-aonar	Guardian, guard, shield
12	-ayne/-al	Lunatic, maniac, manic, rage
13	-baste/-gloth	Path, walker
14	-breena/-antar	Matriarch/patriarch, ruler
15	-bryn/-lyn	Agent, assassin, killer
16	-cice/-roos	Born of, child, young
17	-cyrl/-axle	Ally, companion, friend
18	-da/-daer	Illusionist, trickster
19	-dia/-drin	Rogue, stealer
20	-diira/-diirn	Initiate, sister/brother
21	-dra/-zar	Lover, match, mate
22	-driira/driirn	Mother/father, teacher
23	-dril/-dorl	Knight, sword, warrior
24	-e	Servant, slave, vassal
25	-eari/-erd	Giver, god, patron
26	-eyl	Archer, arrow, flight, flyer
27	-ffyn/-fein	Minstrel, singer, song
28	-fryn	Champion, victor, weapon, weapon of
29	-iara/-ica	Baron, duke, lady/lord
30	-ice/-eth	Obsession, taker, taken
31	-idil/-imar	Alpha, beginning, creator of, maker
32	-iira/-inid	Harbinger, herald
33	-inidia	Secret, wall, warder
34	-inil/-in	Lady/lord, rider, steed
35	-intra	Envoy, messenger, prophet
36	-isstra/-atlab	Acolyte, apprentice, student
37	-ithra/-irahc	Dragon, serpent, wyrm
38	-jra/-gos	Beast, biter, stinger
39	-jss	Scout, stalker
40	-kacha/-kah	Beauty, hair, style
41	-kiira/-raen	Apostle, disciple
42	-lay/-dyn	Flight, flyer, wing, wings
43	-lara/-aghar	Cynic, death, end, victim
44	-lin	Arm, armor, commander
45	-lochar	Messenger, spider
46	-mice/-myr	Bone, bones, necromancer, witch
47	-mur'ss	Shadow, spy, witness
48	-na/-nar	Adept, ghost, spirit
49	-nilee/-olil	Corpse, disease, ravager
50	-niss/-nozz	Chance, gambler, game
51	-nitra/-net	Kicker, returned, risen
52	-nolu	Art, artist, expert, treasure
53	-olin	Ascension, love, lover, lust
54	-onia/-onim	Rod, staff, token, wand
55	-oyss/-omph	Binder, judge, law, prison
56	-qualyn	Ally, caller, kin
57	-quarra/-net	Horde, host, legion
58	-quiri/-oj	Aura, cloak, hide, skin
59	-ra/-or	Fool, game, prey, quarry
60	-rae/-rar	Secret, seeker, quest
61	-raema/-orvir	Crafter, fist, hand
62	-raena/-olvir	Center, haven, home
63	-riia/-rak	Chaos, storm, tempest
64	-ril	Bandit, enemy, raider, outlaw
65	-riina/-ree	Enchanter, mage, spellcaster
66	-ryna/-oyn	Follower, hired, mercenary
67	-ryne/-ryn	Blooded, elder, experienced
68	-shalee/-ral	Abjurer, gaze, watch, watcher
69	-ssysn/-rysn	Artifact, dweomer, sorcerer, spell
70	-stin/-trin	Clan, house, merchant, of the house
71	-stra/-tran	Spider, spinner, weaver
72	-tana/-ton	Darkness, lurker, prowler
73	-thara/-tar	Glyph, marker, rune
74	-thrae/-olg	Charmer, leader, seducer
75	-tree/-tel	Exile, loner, outcast, pariah
76	-tyrr	Dagger, poison, poisoner, scorpion
77	-ual/-dan	Speed, strider
78	-ue/-dor	Arm, artisan, fingers
79	-uit/-dar	Breath, voice, word
80	-une/-diin	Diviner, fate, future, oracle
81	-uque	Cavern, digger, mole, tunnel
82	-urra/-dax	Nomad, renegade, wanderer
83	-va/-ven	Comrade, honor, honored
84	-vayas	Forge, forger, hammer, smith
85	-vyll	Punishment, scourge, whip, zealot
86	-vyrae/-vyr	Mistress/master, overseer
87	-wae/-hrae	Heir, inheritor, princess
88	-wiira/-hriir	Seneschal of, steward
89	-wyss/-hrys	Best, creator, starter
90	-xae/-zaer	Orb, rank, ruler, scepter
91	-xena/-zen	Cutter, gem, jewel, jeweler
92	-xyra/-zyr	Sage, teller
93	-yl	Drow, woman/man
94	-ylene/-yln	Handmaiden/squire, maiden/youth
95	-ymma/-inyon	Drider, feet, foot, runner
96	-ynda/-yrd	Captain, custodian, marshal, ranger
97	-ynrae/-yraen	Heretic, rebel, riot, void
98	-vrae	Architect, founder, mason
99	-yrr	Protector, rival, wielder
100	-zyne/-zt	Finder, hunter

Table 4: Drow House Name Prefixes

1d100	Prefix	Meaning
1–3	Alean-	The noble line of
4–6	Ale-	Traders in
7–10	Arab-	Daughters of
11–13	Arken-	Mages of
14–16	Auvry-	Blood of the
17–20	Baen-	Blessed by
21–23	Barri-	Spawn of
24–26	Cladd-	Warriors from
27–30	Desp-	Victors of
31–33	De-	Champions of
34–36	Do'	Walkers in
37–40	Eils-	Lands of
41–43	Everh-	The cavern of
44–46	Fre-	Friends to
47–50	Gode-	Clan of
51–53	Helvi-	Those above
54–56	Hla-	Seers of
57–60	Hun'	The sisterhood of
61–63	Ken-	Sworn to
64–66	Kil-	People of
67–70	Mae-	Raiders from
71–73	Mel-	Mothers of
74–76	My-	Honored of
77–80	Noqu-	Sacred to
81–83	Orly-	Guild of
84–86	Ouss-	Heirs to
87–90	Rilyn-	House of
91–93	Teken'	Delvers in
94–96	Tor-	Mistresses of
97–100	Zau-	Children of

Table 5: Drow House Name Suffixes

1d100	Suffix	Meaning
1–3	-afin	The web
4–6	-ana	The night
7–10	-ani	The widow
11–13	-ar	Poison
14–16	-arn	Fire
17–20	-ate	The way
21–23	-ath	The dragons
24–26	-duis	The whip
27–30	-ervs	The depths
31–33	-ep	The Underdark
34–36	-ett	Magic
37–40	-ghym	The forgotten ways
41–43	-iryn	History
44–46	-lyl	The blade
47–50	-mtor	The abyss
51–53	-ndar	Black hearts
54–56	-neld	The arcane
57–60	-rae	Fell powers
61–63	-rahel	The gods
64–66	-rret	The void
67–70	-sek	Adamantite
71–73	-th	Challenges
74–76	-tlar	Mysteries
77–80	-t'tar	Victory
81–83	-tyl	The pits
84–86	-und	The spider's kiss
87–90	-urden	The darkness
91–93	-val	Silken weaver
94–96	-viir	Dominance
97–100	-zynge	The ruins

Gamer's Guide

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The City of Sunken Spires

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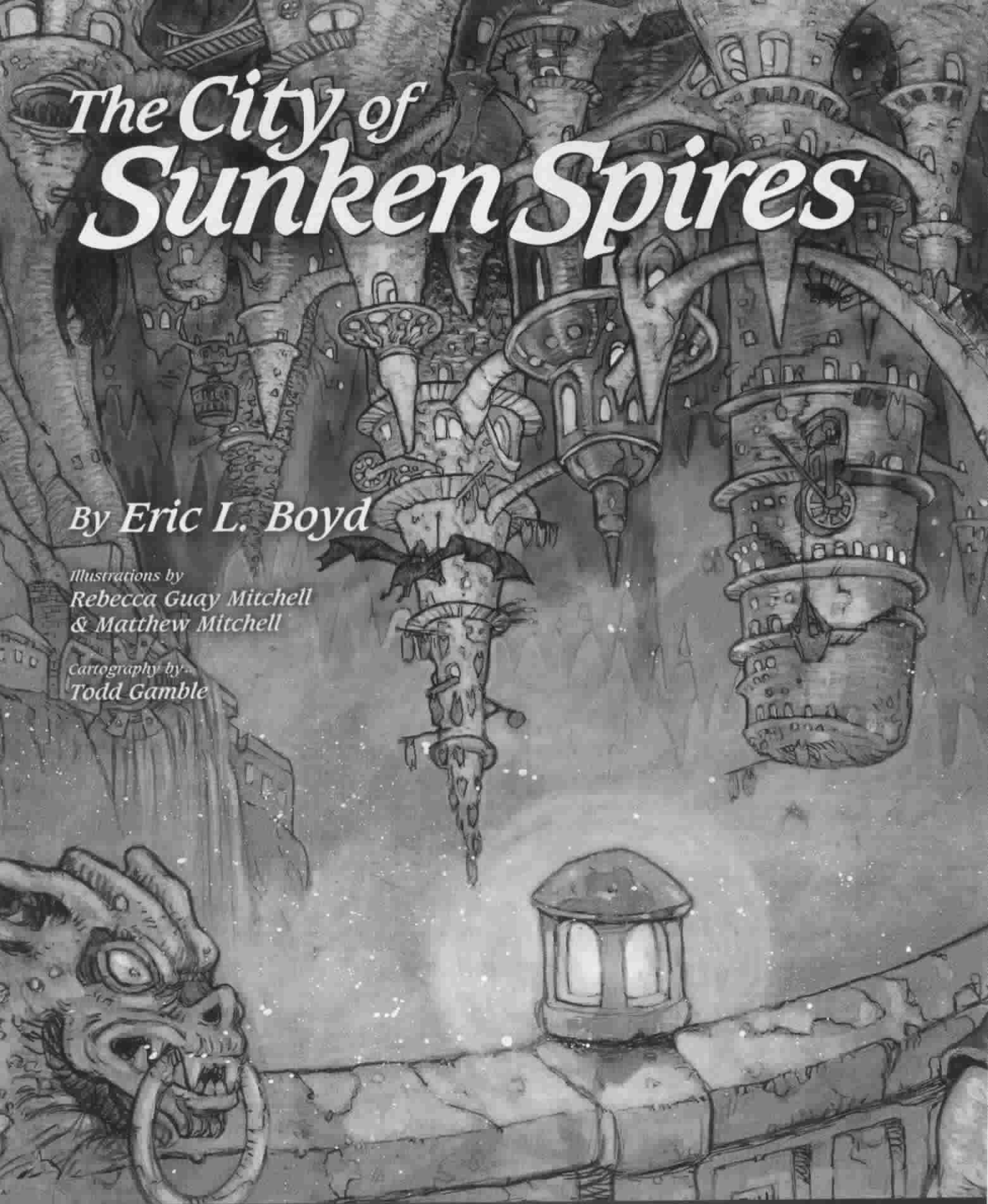


Underspires in your Campaign. Although this article details a subterranean city set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting, Underspires works equally well in any campaign world with a large subterranean environment and deep-dwelling dwarves. For example, in the PLANESCAPE® setting, Underspires might lie at the heart of one of the great cubes of Acheron, amid the endless tunnels of Pandemonium, or deep beneath the surface of the Outlands. In the GREYHAWK® campaign, Underspires might lie deep beneath Hellfurnaces, within a few hundred miles of the drow city of Erelhei-Cinlu (detailed in *Vault of the Drow* and *Dead Gods*) and the Sunless Sea (which you can expand with *Night Below*).

Since the release of the classic *Descent Into the Depths of the Earth*, *Shrine of the Kuo-toa*, and *Vault of the Drow* modules, fans of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game have been inspired to mount expeditions into the Underdark of their favorite campaign setting. Although alien in comparison to most surface settlements, Menzoberranzan, the City of Spiders, represents but one of the many exotic locales found in the depths of Abeir-Toril, the world of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting.

The recently released *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark* details for the first time the major subterranean settlements of the Sword Coast beyond the teeming hive of evil first revealed by the pen of R.A. Salvatore. Nevertheless, the Underdark contains many unique settlements as yet unrevealed. Underspires is one such city, the capital of an expansionistic duergar kingdom that lies on the roof of a great rift in the earth. Llurth Dreir, a vast city of drow enslaved by aboleth (detailed in the RPGA® Network's *POLYHEDRON® MAGAZINE #140*), is another such city that escaped Drizzt Do'Urden's original report.

-Midwinter, Year of the Unstrung Harp

To Queen Alustriel of Silverymoon,
Lady Hope of Luruar, does Drizzt Do'Urden send greetings.

By now my missive regarding the major centers of power in the Realms Below should have reached you and the Council of Twelve. One more report has been delivered into my hands, this one from my contact in the City of Sunken Spires. Duergar designs on the remnants of Shanatar, a long-fallen empire from which the dwarves are descended, might well entangle Luruar in a war that could only undercut all that you hope to achieve. Thus, both despite and because of my friendship with Bruenor Battlehammer and his kin, I deliver this report only to you. I send it in the hopes that you can dissuade the scions of Delzoun from launching a crusade that will only further winnow their numbers and weaken Luruar at the moment of its founding.

Underspires

City of Sunken Spires, Middle Reaches

The city of Underspires, known as Dunspeirrin in the tongue of the Stout Folk (dwarves), lies deep beneath the Mountains of the Alaoreum in northern Turmish, carved into a thicket of massive stalactites that dangle high above a great subterranean chasm. All told, the City of Sunken Spires encompasses more than a thousand dangling speleothems, each of which has been hollowed out to some degree, but the bulk of the populace resides in three score of the largest stalactites. The duergar have linked their nigh-impregnable stronghold via a network of stone ledges and arching bridges. Four massive causeways link the City of Sunken Spires with apertures in the chasm walls, and all ground-based traffic into and out of Underspires must traverse one of the 20'-wide spans.

Although the bottom of the great, mist-cloaked rift has never been plumbed, daring dwarven explorers have determined it extends at least 10 miles into the depths. The walls of the chasm are rich with ores including veins of iron, gold, silver, copper, tin, and trace amounts of hizagkuur and mithral at various depths. Countless varieties of gemstones have been unearthed from the rift walls, including unworked jewels such as amaratha, diamonds, jacinths, and sapphires.

Fierce, unpredictable gusts of wind warmed by updrafts of geothermal heat buffet the chasm, providing a steady source of fresh air and energy. An endless river of moisture seeps through the rock, and four great subterranean rivers empty into the abyss as massive waterfalls, making footing precarious but providing an important source of nutrients to the entire rift. All manner of lichen, fungi, and mosses grow on the stalactites and the walls of the chasm, serving as food for a wide variety of subterranean herbivorous bats. Those bats are preyed on in turn by carnivorous bats, as well as giant spiders and cave fishers.

Examples of duergar adaptation to their environment are everywhere. Small stone basins, hung on the sills of openings into the inhabited stalactites and chilled by small colonies of brown mold, are filled by rivulets of water running down the sides of the stalactites and by condensation. The great waterfalls pouring into the abyss are harnessed to turn great metal waterwheels

Current Clack

• Reports have trickled back from the southwestern front that the duergar-led Army of Steel has fought a series of skirmishes with the gold-dwarf–led Army of Gold. The gray dwarves have reportedly held their entrenched positions amid the Tathtar caverns with minimal losses in the face of a series of probing feints by the gold dwarves. At least a handful of captives are reportedly expected to arrive in Underspires in a matter of days, and already merchants are haggling over the rich battle trophies said to have been seized.

• The War King recently granted an audience to a kuo-toan priest-duke and his retainers, lending an air of truth to speculation that the Steel Kingdom is in the process of hammering out a military alliance with the aboleth and kuo-toa of Leshynmul.The City of Coral Caverns lies deep beneath the Hmur Plateau amid a maze of flooded tunnels that connect with the Tunnels of Iratis. Although Leshynmul's existence has long been rumored among the duergar of Underspires, first contact between the two cities was established less than a decade ago, and trade contacts between the two settlements are still in their infancy. The aboleth savants of Leshynmul are reportedly willing to supply kuo-toan troops and vials of the preserved mucous that facilitates water breathing in exchange for some of the products of Underspires's forges. Moreover, whispers that the aboleth have learned of the long-lost Wyrmskull Throne's current location have lent added urgency to ongoing negotiations.

• The Plungeghosts, restless spirits of duergar who have fall an into the abyss, have been seen again on the southern causeway, forcing the War King to order it sealed by the military. The Plungeghosts' numbers seem to have grown since their last appearance just over three decades ago, and at least one patrol was wiped out when a host of undead spirits drove them off the edge of the causeway. Efforts by the clergy of both Deep Duerra and Laduguer to destroy the Plungeghosts have again met with complete failure, leading many to whisper that some dark god stirs in the depths of the rift and that the Plungeghosts are sent as a warning to those who would disturb his rest.

that in turn are used to power a network of hoists strung along the perimeter of the rift. Wastes are simply dropped into the abyss, although some thought has been given to reusing them as fertilizer to supplement the influx of nutrients from bat guano and surface runoff. In addition to the waterwheel-driven hoists, duergar engineers and miners employ cave fishers to raise and lower raw materials and tools up and down the walls of the rift and to support dangling ledges and bridges as they are constructed.

Who Rules

Underspires is the capital of a militaristic, subterranean kingdom that has long been ruled by its preeminent generals. These leaders are drawn from the ranks of the city's elite bloodlines and known as war kings upon their coronation. The Steel Kingdom is currently ruled by War King Olorn Ridaugaur (LE gray dm F19/Psi10), a dark-skinned dwarf who stands nearly 12 feet tall. Ridaugaur can hurl gusts of wind with a simple gesture and claims to be the son of Deep Duerra, the demigod of duergar conquest, and the grandson of Laduguer, patron god of the duergar species.

Ridaugaur wields the Scepter of Barakuir, one of the ten Ruling Scepters of Shanatar, although he cannot employ any of its powers beyond using it as a club. The Scepter of Barakuir, which also served as the Scepter of Holorarar after the Iron Kingdom's fall, carries the symbol of Laduguer, a shield with a broken crossbow motif. It was recaptured by the scions of Clan Duergar centuries ago, when Holorarar was overrun during the final years of Deep Shanatar, and it has been handed down by the monarchs of House Ridaugaur ever since. The current War King has sent many agents throughout the Underdark, seeking out the words of power so he can claim the Wyrmskull Throne. His ambitions make him all the more dangerous, as he and his offspring are the last of the bloodline of Taark Shanat, though distantly related through more than one hundred generations. (Further details on the Wyrmskull Throne and the Scepter of Barakuir/Holorarar can be found in *The Wyrmskull Throne* adventure.)

Who Really Rules

War Queen Ovdana Xothcorlar (LE gray df P12—Duerra/Psi12), daul of Cathbara, blood of Llaemna, is the high priestess of Duerra in Underspires and the true power behind the throne. Ovdana, whose clerical title is the Voice of the Depths, speaks with the authority of the Deep Duerra, and the War King seeks her counsel in all matters of state.

Population

The City of Sunken Spires is home to more than 120,000 duergar, nearly half of the entire population of the Steel Kingdom. Visitors to the city are rare, with most trade conducted in other city-states by duergar merchants wandering far afield.

At present, approximately 90,000 slaves reside in Underspires, fewer than half of those held prior to the Time of Troubles. In the past 12 years, the bulk of the duergar realm's slave populace has been drafted into the War King's far-flung army, and the number of slaves remaining in Underspires continues to dwindle. Most of them are drow, humans, shield dwarves, or svirfneblin, with children and females predominating. Most drow found in the City of Sunken Spires hail from the city-state of Undraeth, which lies deep beneath the Aphrunn Mountains of southern Turmish. Humans are bought from slavers based in the Vilhon Reach and Dragon Coast regions. Most shield dwarves found in Underspires were captured in the decades-long war with Ironfang Keep or are

descended from prisoners of that conflict. Svirfneblin are descended from captives seized from small deep gnome holds scattered throughout the north.

The inhabitants of Underspires have domesticated large numbers of semisentient species commonly considered monsters. Steeders, members of a subspecies of giant arachnid bred by the duergar, are not restricted to the gray dwarven cavalry. Over 15,000 giant spiders of this type are found in the City of Sunken Spires, employed by the various clans as mounts and beasts of burden. Although countless thousands of bats make their home nesting among the dangling spires of the city, fewer than 2,000 are employed as aerial mounts for the duergar air cavalry, and few, if any, are trained by private citizens. Cave fishers, uniquely suited to the vertical terrain of Underspires, are found in great numbers as well. More than 1,200 of these insectoids have been trained as beasts of burden.

Major Products

Armor (chainmail, platemail), ballistae, cave fishers (bred and trained as beasts of burden), foodstuffs (fungi, lichen, and mosses), gemstones, giant bats (bred and trained as mounts), mercenaries, mushroom ale, steeders (bred and trained as mounts and beasts of burden), and weapons (axes, bolts, crossbows, flails, maces, and swords).

Armed Forces

The Steel Kingdom maintains a huge standing army that includes over 40,000 duergar warriors and 80,000 slave levies. As part of that total, 5,000 gray dwarves are mounted on steeders, and 2,000 duergar are mounted on giant bats. At present, nearly half the duergar troops and the majority of the conscripts are in the southwestern reaches of the Steel Kingdom, securing the deepest tunnels of ancient Tathtar beneath the Deepwing and Cloven Mountains and pushing on into what were once the eastern caverns of Deep Shanatar. Moreover, half of the remaining troops are allocated to outlying strongholds, leaving only one quarter of the totals to guard Underspires itself.

New Proficiencies

Animal Handling (Cave Fishers)
(2 Slot, Wisdom, -1 Check Modifier)
Cave fishers are not normally amenable to domestication, and they can only be used as beasts of burden after many years of training. In addition to the effects outlined in the *Player's Handbook* for the general proficiency, a successful proficiency check indicates that a character can direct a cave fisher to fire its strong adhesive filament toward the desired target and then suspend the target at a fixed distance or slowly reel it in.

Land-based Riding (Steeders)
(2 Slot, Wisdom, +3 Check Modifier)
Those skilled in the art of riding and handling steeders, known as kavalrach among the duergar, can perform a unique set of feats that differ from those normally associated with riding horses and other mounts common to the surface.

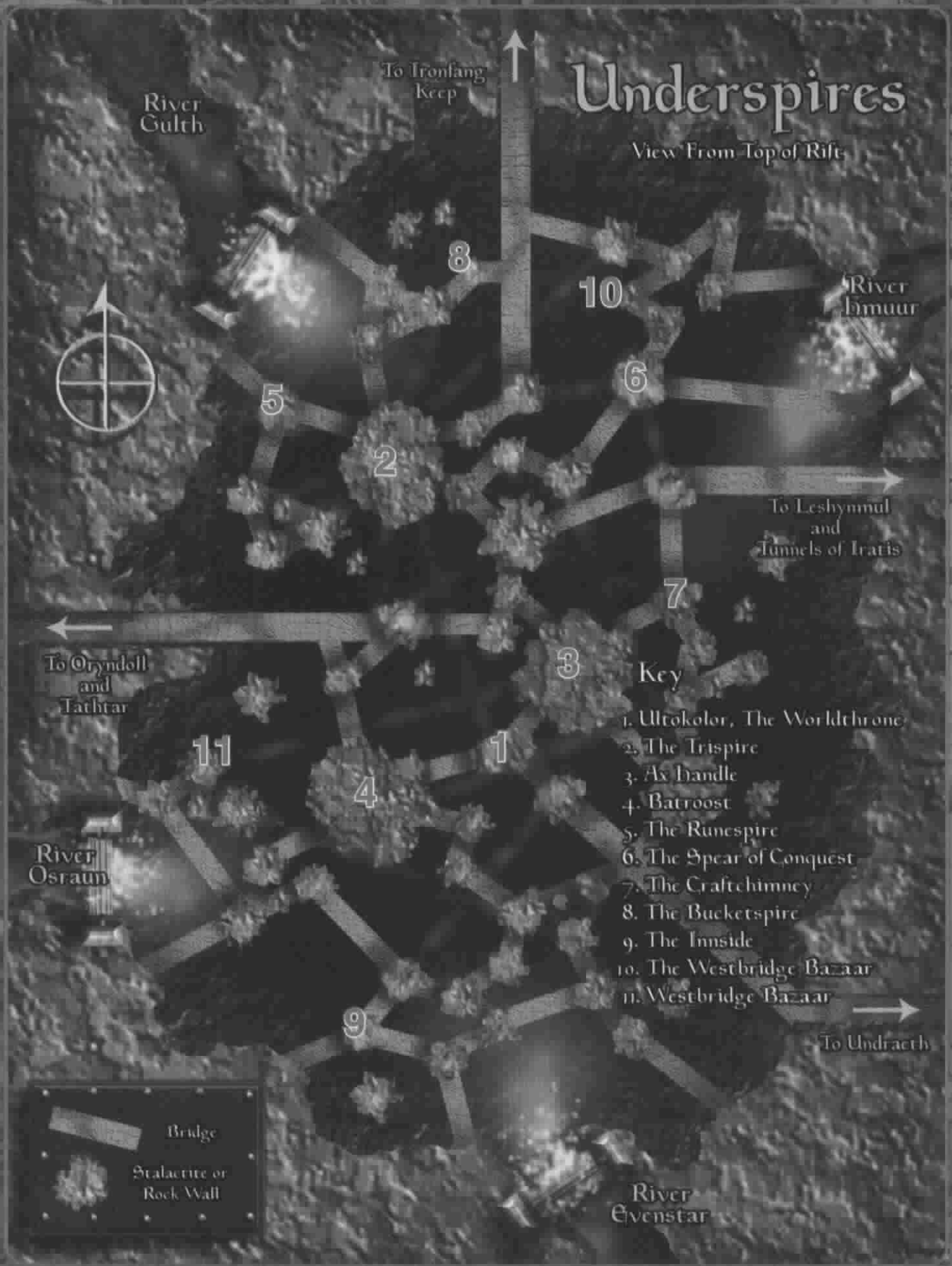
- While the elaborate saddles of the duergar preclude vaulting onto a steeder, dropping down and hanging alongside the steed, or leaping from the back of such a mount, the character can hang on vertical surfaces or upside down without difficulty. Moreover, the character can fight without penalty in such unusual circumstances. It takes 2-4 rounds to strap into a steeder saddle, but only 1 round to extricate oneself.
- The character can urge the steeder to jump tall obstacles or leap across wide gaps. No check is required if the obstacle is less than 60 feet tall or less than 120 feet wide. If the character wants to roll a proficiency check, the mount can be urged to leap up to 240 feet in any direction. Success means that the steeder has made the jump. Failure indicates that the steeder jumps to a random position. No check is necessary to see whether the character retains his or her seat, as he or she cannot be involuntarily dislodged.
- Attempts to spur a steeder on to greater speed are made in accordance with the general proficiency description in the *Player's Handbook*.
- Steeders can only be guided with control prods, hence two-handed weapons cannot be employed when mounted on a steeder. The only available second weapon is the control prod, which doubles as a club in a pinch. (In effect, this is a free weapon proficiency.) However, in any round in which the control prod is used as a weapon, a separate proficiency check must be made to see if the steeder responds as desired.

Further details on steeders and their use as mounts appear given DRAGON MAGAZINE #245, "*The Ecology of the Steeder.*"

Spelunking
(2 Slots, NA, NA)
Spelunking subsumes the Mountaineering proficiency, as detailed in the *Player's Handbook*, and includes all the abilities described therein. A character who has already spent 1 nonweapon proficiency slot on Mountaineering can upgrade it to Spelunking by expending an additional nonweapon proficiency slot.

In addition to navigating steep slopes and cliffs, a skilled spelunker can navigate many cave-ins, chasms, speleothems (cave formations), submerged tunnels, and tight squeezes in near darkness. A spelunker can guide characters through treacherous subterranean terrain they could not otherwise navigate at half their normal movement rate.

Underspires
View From Top of Rift
To Ironfang Keep
River Gulth
River Imuur
To Leshynmul and Tunnels of Iratis
To Oryndoll and Tathtar
To Undraeth
River Osraun
River Evenstar
Key
1. Ultokolor, The Worldthrone
2. The Trispire
3. Ax Handle
4. Batroost
5. The Runespire
6. The Spear of Conquest
7. The Craftchimney
8. The Bucketspire
9. The Innside
10. The Westbridge Bazaar
11. Westbridge Bazaar
Bridge
Stalactite or Rock Wall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View From Top of Rift
To Tronfang Keep
River Gulth
River Limuur
To Leshynmul and Tunnels of Iratis
To Oryndoll and Tathtar
River Osraun
River Evenstar
To Undraeth
Key
1. Ultokolor, The Worldthrone
2. The Trispire
3. Ax Handle
4. Batroost
5. The Runespire
6. The Spear of Conquest
7. The Craftchimney
8. The Bucketspire
9. The Innside
10. The Westbridge Bazaar
11. Westbridge Bazaar
Bridge
Stalactite or Rock Wall

However, any invader would have to pass through hundreds of miles of heavily fortified tunnels beneath Turmish just to reach the periphery of Underspires, ensuring that the War King would have plenty of time to recall his troops. In addition, the omnipresent mist of the great rift cloaks most of the defensive fortifications erected by the duergar and precludes aerial assaults by those unfamiliar with the thicket of speleothems that adorn the roof of the great rift.

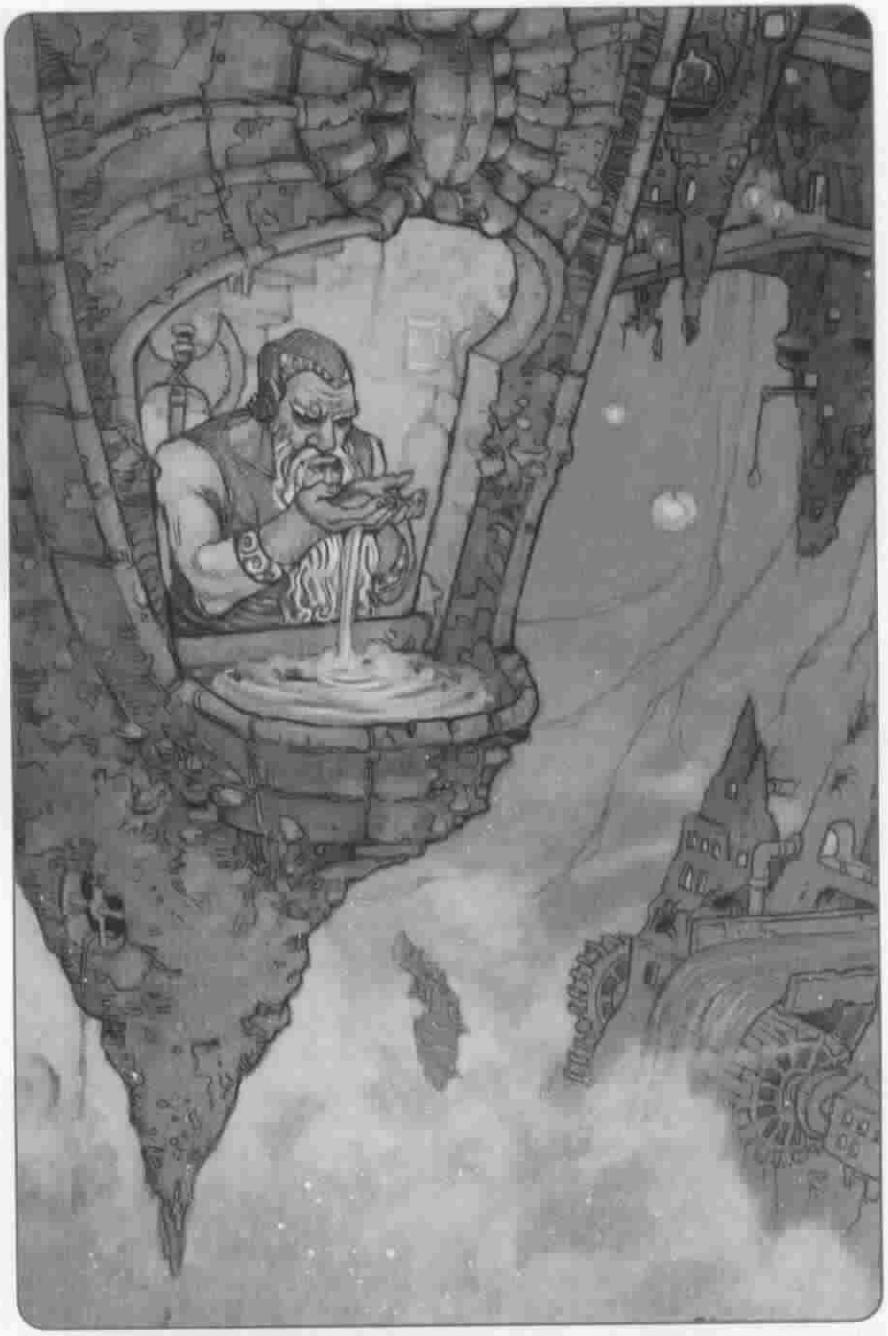
Notable Mages & Sages

As is common among the Stout Folk, Underspires has few resident wizards. However, the royal seat of the Steel Kingdom is home to a small but thriving community of duergar scholars.

Mhaergard Axeglyph (LE gray dm F9) is one of the most knowledgeable historians of Underdark military history, rivaled only by Pvelnqa Tsunglyl, a member of the secretive derro elite of the duergar city of Gracklstugh that lies far to the north beneath the lands of the Savage Frontier. Mhaergard holds the title of Royal Runewarden and is attended by a dozen senior apprentices and tens of junior apprentices. He and his apprentices dwell in the Runespire [5] and are responsible for recording and maintaining the history of the Steel Kingdom, which is recorded on runestones and dominated by accounts of military campaigns waged over the eons by the descendants of Clan Duergar. Moreover, the Royal Runewarden and his assistants are expected to play an active role in planning military strategy and training duergar officers. This practice has enabled the Steel Kingdom's standing army to refine the art of war to a level unmatched throughout the Underdark of Faerûn, with the notable exception of the Deep Kingdom of the gold dwarves.

Notable Clergy & Churches

Underspires is unusual in that the primary deity of its duergar inhabitants is Deep Duerra, Daul of Laduguer. Her father, the Master of Crafts, is relegated to a secondary role. Among the slave races held by the duergar of Underspires, only shield dwarves and svirfneblin retain much of their native cultures. Religious expression among these two races, while discouraged, is never stamped out entirely, and many secretly worship the Morndinsamman and the Lords of the Golden Hills, respectively. Humans are an adaptable race, and most human slaves of the duergar adopt the gods of the Stout Folk and svirfneblin, as well as their traditional clan structures. Only religious expression by drow prisoners is actively crushed by the duergar, shattering the traditional dominance of female worshipers of Lolth within the drow slave subculture. However, the presence of countless spiders within the rift over which Underspires hangs gives secret hope to many drow that the Spider Queen will eventually overthrow the hated gray dwarves.



The duergar of Underspires are never troubled by a fear of heights.

The Spear of Conquest [6], temple complex to Deep Duerra; War Queen Ovdana Xothcorlar (see above); 336 priests and 512 followers. This temple complex occupies an entire stalactite and serves a tripartite role as a college for military strategy, a school of psionics, and the primary house of worship for the populace.

Important Characters

• King-in-exile Jhorn Flamebeard (NE gold dm F16), the deposed king of the dwarven realm of Glitterdelve, ended up in Underspires after he was stripped of his title and fled imprisonment by the Deep Lords of the Deep Realm. A greedy, self-serving gold dwarf, Jhorn was convicted of selling military secrets to the duergar. As the former Duke of the Westserpent, commander of the Deep Realm's western army, Jhorn is privy to many of the most closely guarded secrets of the Deep Realm. He has parleyed his knowledge into a position of some prominence among the War King's military advisors, but he is well aware that the duergar will sell him into slavery or have him killed the moment his usefulness comes to an end.

• Ubelein "Fatreek" Shubelith (LE gray dm F9/Psi9) is a prosperous merchant and senior member of the Order of the Anvil. Ubelein acts as a supplier for Xalyth's Company in Menzoberranzan, a position that allows him to travel throughout the Realms Below, channeling the output of Underspires's forges to cities scattered across the northern reaches of the Underdark. In addition, Ubelein has made a small fortune shepherding specially commissioned suits of armor and weapons of incredible quality from the forges of Underspires to human and drow wizards who seek to enchant magical armaments. Ubelein's nickname, given to him by Xalyth, stems from the rothé fat he smears all over his rotund form, a form of perfumery common among wealthy duergar of the South but considered revolting by most drow, gold dwarves, shield dwarves, svirfneblin, and surface dwellers.

The Craftchimney [7], temple complex to Laduguer, High Swordsmith Noradkyrn Ironforge; 64 priests and 111 followers. This temple complex occupies a small stalactite with a hollow inner core open at the bottom. Great forges adorn the ledges that encircle the central shaft, creating a column of black smoke that is vented up the Craftchimney and out into the greater chasm through small tunnels at the stalactite's root.

Notable Guilds

Underspires' most prominent clans include Clan Alaghar, Clan Axeglyph, Clan Donnarlin, Clan Glanderrin, Clan Ironforge, Clan Shubelith, Clan Thawtcorl, and Clan Xothcorlar, although there are at least thrice that number of lesser clans. The clans of the City of Sunken Spires fulfill the role of the guilds found in most large settlements on the surface, although no duergar crafts are restricted to any single clan. Within the military, the clans form the backbone of the regimental structure, and new clans typically arise from an unusually prominent military unit.

The City of Sunken Spires is also home to a handful of secret societies, although most such groups are nominally agents of the reigning War King. The Thoughthunters serve as the secret police of the Steel Kingdom, ferreting out dissent among the populace. Composed primarily of psionicists, the leadership of this society is made up of Duerran psionicist/priests who answer directly to War Queen Ovdana Xothcorlar in her role as high priestess of the Duerran faith in the kingdom. Although the War Queen is supposed to pass such reports to the reigning monarch, her control over the War King's spy network is a cornerstone of her power and she filters such reports accordingly.

Formed as a secretive branch of the military, the Invisible Blades serve as the assassins' and spies' guild of the Steel Kingdom. Although most targets are of a military nature, on occasion members of this society are dispatched against dissenters within the populace. Over the centuries, this group has come to exercise a great deal of autonomy from their nominal military commanders, and many of the most prominent members are powerful psionicists.

The Order of the Anvil is a secret brotherhood of duergar craftsmen dominated by metalsmiths. The group played a much more prominent role in Underspires' society in centuries past, but the rise of the military and the Duerran faith effectively marginalized this group's influence. The order now serves as a relatively nonthreatening outlet for dissent and has been thoroughly infiltrated by the Thoughthunters.

The Rift Plumbers are a secretive group dedicated to the exploration of the rift over which the City of Sunken Spires hangs. Members of this group regularly organize expeditions into the depths of the rift, but none have reached the bottom as of yet. Although this group was founded quite openly several centuries ago, it was quickly outlawed by the reigning War King who feared they might awaken some slumbering terror. Since then, the Rift Plumbers have been forced to operate clandestinely, although reports of their successes are usually an open secret.

Equipment Shops

Full. (Items selling for 500 gp or less are available in the city, and more expensive items can be acquired for those willing to wait or pay a lot.)

Adventurer's Quarters

Although the merchants of the Steel Kingdom trade extensively with cities throughout the Underdark of Faerûn, the realm's nigh-perpetual state of war with its immediate neighbors ensures that most such mercantile activity is conducted by far-wandering merchants in the markets of distant city-states. Underspires is a major trading hub, but its markets are dominated by duergar craftsmen engaged in trade with each other and with merchants from the realm's outlying clanholds. As such, foreign traders are quite rare in the City of Sunken Spires, and only one inn provides accommodations for non-duergar visitors. Those few trading establishments that are open to non-native merchants are found in the Westbridge Bazaar [11], and agents of the War King (often disguised as members of the staff) keep a close eye on goings-on therein.

When they said it was a swinging tavern, what did you expect?

The Bucketspire [8] (fair/cheap), despite its relatively bland fare, is not to be missed by the daring at heart. Constructed from petrified wood, this open-roofed, bucket-shaped structure dangles from the tip of a mid-sized stalactite, firmly suspended above the chasm below by a massive chain threaded through a hole in the spleothem's tip and attached to the structure at four equidistant points in the floor. Duergar traders make up more than half the regular clientele, enticing disguised outsiders who seek to negotiate private deals away from the Westbridge Bazaar. A favorite sport of the regulars is to get the entire structure swaying back and forth in a most alarming fashion, often in time with one of several never-ending martial songs. The house brew, Bat's Blood, is a vile concoction of iron-enriched mead with a powerful kick, and few non-dwarves can stomach it even before the entire tavern begins its nightly swaying.

The Innside [9] (fair/expensive) provides the only accommodations for non-duergar visitors in the city. Frequented by ambassadors, intrepid merchants, and a handful of dauntless mercenary bands, the Innside is under constant supervision by the Thoughthunters. Regular efforts by some of the War King's more xenophobic advisors to have the Innside shut down and non-duergar visitors barred from traveling beyond the Westbridge Bazaar have so far been rebuffed on the grounds that foreigners' activities can best be contained if their visits to the City of Sunken Spires are officially sanctioned by the War King and tightly regulated by the military.

The Plunging Pinnacle [10] (good/expensive) is a large tavern whose continued existence is a miracle of duergar engineering. Housed in a stalactite that broke loose from the roof of the chasm over a century ago, the entire structure has been held aloft ever since by mithral rods that extend horizontally into a ring of smaller stalactites that encircle the severed spire. The Plunging Pinnacle's drinking area actually lies on the flat top of the stalactite, providing one of the few unimpeded views of the cavern roof aside from the soaring spans that knit the city together. The house specialty is Cloudfoam, a noxious brew rumored to contain fermented bat guano.

Important Features in Town

The royal palace and great Duerran temple of Underspires is known as Ultokolor, the Worldthrone [1]. Fashioned by the duergar in the form of a great steel stalactite and imbedded in the roof of the chasm, Ultokolor is home to House Ridaugaur and its attendants, as well as the senior generals of the Steel Kingdom. At the heart of the Worldthrone is a vast circular council chamber dominated by a great dais. Traditionally, the War Kings of Underspires stand on the dais and do not sit on a throne when giving audiences, an ancient tradition that stems from a prophecy cherished by the duergar that one of their own will one day sit on the Wyrmskull Throne.

The three largest stalactites of Underspires are the Trispire [2], the Ax Handle [3], and the Batroost [4]. The first, formed from three massive stalactites that grew together over the eons, is home to many individual duergar artisans and miners. The second, a thick column with a wide flat tip, houses the poorest duergar citizens who earn their living harvesting lichen, fungi, and mosses. The third, which glows like a torch when viewed with infravision and appears jet black when viewed with the aid of a light source, is perennially cloaked in thousands of bats. Underneath the guano-caked exterior are the main barracks of the Steel Kingdom's armed forces.

Even the environment of the great mist-cloaked chasm over which Underspires hangs does not really explain the scale of the stalactites in which the duergar have built their city. It is said that the first gray dwarves to tunnel into the stalactites discovered great rods of unworked adamantite at the core of each of the major spires. Put in place millennia ago by a forgotten race, the adamant cores provide both the foundation on which the stalactites first formed and the tensile strength by

New Magic

Tether Rings

The clergy of Laduguer forges tether rings from magically enchanted lodestone. A tether ring cannot be moved more than 50 yards from the last piece of metal it touched. If an attempt is made to move a metal object or the tether ring beyond this distance, one item or the other must move, as the two are bound by an unbreakable, invisible tether. However, as soon as a tether ring is touched to a new piece of metal, the previous tether is instantly severed.

Many wealthy duergar of Underspires employ tether rings to increase their personal safety when navigating the labyrinth of bridges and ledges that links the stalactites of Underspires. For this reason, steel plates are firmly embedded into the closest stalactite wall at the ends of most spans, and owners of tether rings always carry at least one other piece of metal on their person. Despite their usefulness, tether rings might fail when employed by the Stout Folk just like any other magical item, due to the innate resistance to magic of all dwarves.

XP Value: 500 GP Value: 1,000

which these massive speleothems keep from collapsing. If word of these great rods ever spread beyond the inhabitants of Underspires, it might well precipitate a great war between the duergar and powerful opponents who would seek to tear the city apart and claim its most precious resource for themselves.

Local Lore: In the earliest days of Shanatar, the great kingdom of the shield dwarves, the ruling families of the eight original subkingdoms all sought to claim the Wyrmskull Throne and unite all the realms into an empire. The Iron Kingdom of Barakuir, dominated by the dwarves of Clan Duergar, was a strict theocracy dominated by the clergy of Laduguer and led by a priest-king known as the Iron Shield. Barakuir was a fierce adversary of both Ultoksamrin and Drakkalor, two other Shanataran subkingdoms, a rivalry that grew into open conflict during the Spawn Wars. Although the Iron Kingdom did join the empire of Shanatar, Barakuir's royal house was not selected to rule all of Shanatar, a position to which a succession of monarchs thought they were entitled. Over time the Iron Kingdom withdrew in all but name from the aegis of the Wyrmskull Throne, and the other clans of Barakuir fled the increasingly tyrannical rule of Clan Duergar.

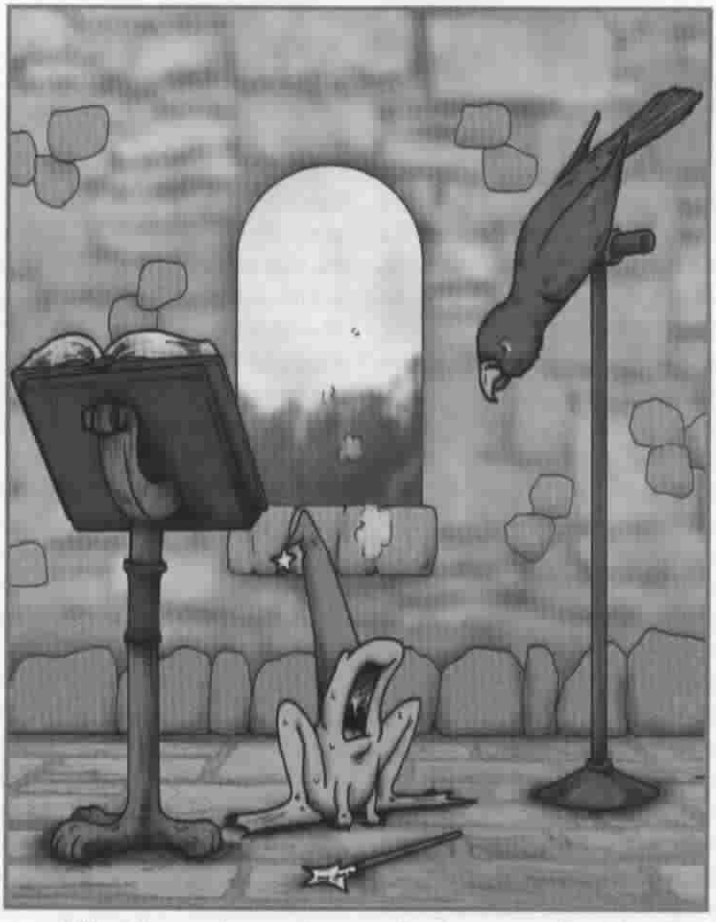
Long before the fall of the great shield dwarven empire of Shanatar, the armies of the Wyrmskull Throne battled the illithids of Oryndoll in a series of conflicts known to the Stout Folk as the Mindstalker Wars. During this strife, the subkingdom of Barakuir was cut off from the rest of Shanatar and its population apparently disappeared. Unbeknownst to the shield dwarves of Shanatar, the inhabitants of Barakuir were enslaved by the illithids of Oryndoll. After centuries of thralldom, the gray dwarves escaped their ancient masters in a series of rebellions, emerging as a unique dwarven subrace with strong psionic powers. One of the earliest settlements founded by the duergar was Underspires.

Beginning in the Year of the Roaring Horn (1288 DR), the gray dwarves of Underspires waged a 5-decade-long and ultimately inconclusive war with their surface kin in Ironfang Keep among the Mountains of the Alaoreum. (This is not to be confused with the mysterious fortress of the same name on the shores of the Moonsea.) That conflict, known to the shield dwarves of the Alaoreum as the Campaign of Darkness, has continued fitfully to the current day and is the main source of reports regarding Underspires attempts to reach the surface world.

In the Year of Shadows (1358 DR), during the Fall of the Gods, Deep Duerra's avatar appeared in Underspires in the form of the Queen Mother, who was serving as regent of the duergar city until War King Olorn reached his maturity. Duerra began assembling and training an army of elite duergar warriors. Initial forays against the outlying dwarven and drow settlements of Ironfang and Undraeth served to shape the army of Underspires into its highest level of readiness in centuries. Under the leadership of their divine regent, the duergar extended their holdings to the Underdark tunnels deep beneath the Deepwing and Cloven Mountains, reaching into the deepest mines of long-fallen Tathtar. Duerra then disappeared into the southernmost reaches of the Underdark, and the young War King ascended to the Worldthrone.

Since the Time of Troubles, the duergar king has sent his armies against the illithids of Oryndoll to the west, deep beneath the Shining Plains, and against the drow, dwarves, and svirfneblin beneath the Dragonreach lands to the north. In the 12 years of war, the gray dwarves have overrun the outlying territories of their enemies, but the quick conquests won under Duerra's leadership have been few and far between. The emerging empire of the gray dwarves has rekindled many ancient enmities, and it might be vulnerable to a concerted attack by its foes.

In a desperate attempt to flee the wrath of Faerûn's gods, Eric has been hiding out in the Underdark, where of late he only narrowly survived an illithid breeding experiment.



By Aaron Williams

"Would you please stop reading over my shoulder?!!

circular mouth ringed with many sharp teeth, in the manner of a lamprey. Slap the whole thing onto the end of a really fat elephant's trunk, and you get the general idea.

Zygodacts are very nimble with their finger extremities, and the fact that they have eyes on the ends of their fingers makes fine detail work that much easier for them. (Zygodacts are renowned throughout the Underdark for their intricate writing, leatherworking, painting, gemcutting, and carving skills.) They have two sets of eyelids: a standard, fleshy exterior eyelid and a transparent, hard, inner nictitating membrane. Zygodacts usually cover their eyes with their transparent inner eyelid whenever using their appendage extremities as hands. On the down side, having to share a head and a hand on the same appendage does make some things impractical for the creatures: Holding a weapon means devoting one appendage to the role of "hand," leaving the other appendage to serve as "head." Zygodacts who devote both appendages to serve as "hands" severely limits their range of vision.

Because of their heavily armored bodies, zygodacts are less concerned with their own personal safety than are many other races—even zygodact wizards like to jump into the midst of a fray. Zygodacts occasionally retract their upper appendages into their carapace, tip the carapace forward until it's parallel to the ground, and go racing full-sprint into a crowd of enemies. They inflict 1–6 points of bludgeoning damage using such tactics; smaller creatures might be thrown prone to the ground after impact. A small spine juts forward from each zygodact knee joint, which can inflict 1–3 points of damage upon an enemy. The zygodact mouth structure makes biting enemies an unlikely proposition; zygodacts strike at –4 to hit when biting in combat and thus rarely do so. If a bite is successful, though, the zygodact's numerous teeth inflict 1–4 points of damage the first round and an automatic 1–2 points of damage every round thereafter until the zygodact is dislodged (with a successful Strength check by the victim, made at –2).

Zygodacts are omnivorous. They prefer meat when they can get it, but make do with lichens, mosses, and fungis when meat is unavailable.

Zygodact language sounds almost reptilian, with an abundance of sibilant hisses. There is little variation in tonal quality, no matter how excited or bored the speaking zygodact might be, and the volume seldom exceeds a loud whisper. The language is not easy for members of other races to speak, for some sounds can be produced only from two sets of vocal chords speaking at once. Zygodacts can learn to speak other racial tongues, and many speak Undercommon as a second language. When doing so, they often begin a sentence with one head and finish it with the other, a habit most other races find distracting.

Roleplaying a zygodact is one of the few opportunities to run a two-headed character. The overall "alienness" of the zygodact is its most distinctive feature.

Zygodacts have a somewhat haughty and superior attitude when it comes to other races; they can't help but feel pity for the poor "single-headers." Other races have a difficult time "reading" a zygodact, as they have no facial expressions as such and their speech retains the same moderate tone whether they're saying "I think we should try the passageway on the right" or "A poisonous spider just dropped into your hair."

Just as diopsids are fascinated with exotic weaponry, zygodacts find magic and magical items enthralling. Any type of magic is revered; a zygodact warrior would rather wield a dagger that radiates light upon command but grants no combat bonuses than a nonmagical broadsword, even though the broadsword would inflict far greater damage to the zygodact's enemies. The zygodact love of magic does not extend to cursed items; they see these as grand attempts at magical item construction that must nevertheless be destroyed as failures.

Zygodact Basic Game Information

Ability Score Adjustments. Zygodacts receive a +1 bonus to both Intelligence and Wisdom, but they suffer a –1 penalty to Strength and a –1 penalty to Charisma.

Ability Score Range

Ability	Min	Max
Strength	3	17
Dexterity	8	18
Constitution	3	18
Intelligence	6	18
Wisdom	6	18
Charisma	3	15

Class Restrictions

Class	Max Level
Fighter	8
Mage	12
Specialist Mage	12
Cleric	10
Druid	10
Thief	6

Zygodact thieves have the following adjustments to their thieving abilities: +10% to Pick Pockets and Open Locks (it helps having eyes on your fingers), –10% to Move Silently and Hide in Shadows, –5% to Climb Walls.

On the rare occasions that zygodacts multiclass, they invariably include the wizard or priest class in the combination. Fighter- /mages and thief/mages are the most common multiclass combinations. Zygodact druids are members of the Gray Druid branch, as detailed in *The Complete Druid's Handbook*.

Hit Dice. Zygodacts receive Hit Dice by class.

Alignment. Most zygodacts are neutral, but zygodact PCs may be of any alignment.

Natural Armor Class. The zygodact's thick carapace and armored legs have a natural AC of 3. Their arm/neck appendages and head/hands are much softer, with a natural AC of 7 when extended. (When the appendages are retracted into the carapace, they drop to AC 3 like the rest of the creature.) Aiming a weapon blow at a zygodact's extended appendage requires a called shot.

Average Height and Weight: *Height:* 64 + 1d12 (to the top of the carapace when standing upright; the height to the top of the head fluctuates depending on how far the upper appendages are extended). *Weight:* 150+7d10.

Age: Starting Age: 15 + 1d4. Maximum *Age Range:* 100 + 1d20 years. *Average Maximum Age:* 110 years. *Middle Age:* 50 years. *Old Age:* 67 years. *Venerable:* 100 years.

THE drow

PC Portraits

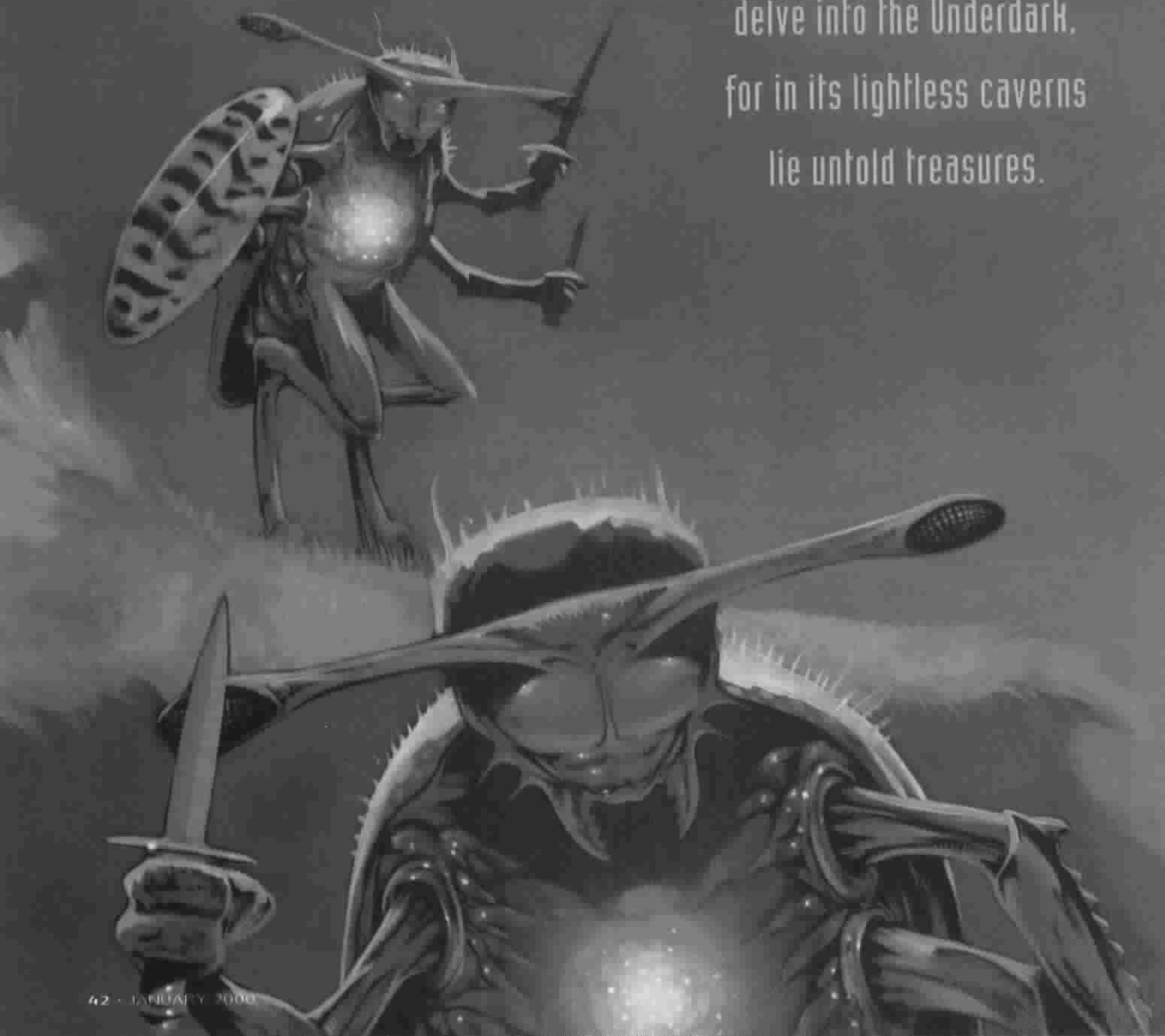
by David Day

"This assignment on the drow has been a learning experience for me," claims David Day. "Of course, I had heard of Drizzt, the dark elf, but that was about as far as it went. After doing some research I realized that I wouldn't want to cross any of these folks in a dark cavern, but they certainly are great to draw (and play)!"

by Johnathan M. Richards illustrated by Jeff Miracola

Denizens of the Underdark

Adventuring bands love to delve into the Underdark, for in its lightless caverns lie untold treasures.



Indeed, the Underdark is the favored locale for the standard dungeon crawl.

DMs love such excursions, too, for there are hazards galore in the subterranean environment: rockslides and cave-ins, poor ventilation and pockets of gas, and all sorts of dangerous inhabitants, intelligent and otherwise.

There are already a small handful of PC races that dwell in the sunless world below. Here are three new character races for the Underdark setting, allowing players to devise characters from such bizarre stock as upright-walking beetles; intelligent, floating fungi; and two-headed, bipedal, carapaced monstrosities.

Even if the DM is not interested in running an Underdark-based campaign, the races detailed below can be used as special NPCs to spring on the party when they next venture into the sunless world of the subterranean realms. Such NPCs can help or harass the PCs, as best fits the DM's campaign.

Diopsids

Diopsids are large, underground beetles that walk upright on their hind legs, using their other four limbs as arms. Their most distinctive features are their red, multifaceted eyes, which project sideways on long, narrow stalks. Unlike snails' eyestalks, diopsids' eyestalks are immobile; they cannot move them around. Thus, diopsids must walk sideways down narrow passageways, for the span of their eyestalks is greater than the width of their bodies.

The length from eyestalk to eyestalk is an important distinction between diopsids. Males are often intimidated by other males with "wider eyes," and the greater the eyestalk length among females, the more attractive they are to the males.

Like many insects, diopsids begin life as grubs. A diopsid grub bears little resemblance to its adult form, appearing when it hatches like a giant, 4'-long white maggot. Diopsid grubs lack intelligence and are little more than eating machines. Their first 3 years of life are spent doing little else, until they reach a length of 7 feet or so. Once a grub metamorphosizes into its adult form (a process that takes about a week, at the end of which the beetle rips out of its discarded "grub-skin"), it enters into adult society and is raised by the entire diopsid community. Diopsids do not grow larger once they've attained adult form, so it's usually impossible for members of other races to tell the difference between a diopsid elder and one "fresh from the grub." Diopsids live only about 25 years.

The diopsid language is visual, based upon lightning-quick flashes of bioluminescence from glands in their abdomens. Such light-flashes are similar to the pulses of light produced by the common lightning bug. The light pulses flash on and off with amazing rapidity. While diopsids find it easy to interpret their language, other races have a difficult time separating the individual pulses into a coherent message. For obvious reasons, diopsids communicate only among themselves in this fashion. In fact, they have so much control over their own light-flashes that they can project their light-frequencies into the infrared spectrum, where their messages cannot be seen even by those unable to employ infravision. (This is the diopsid equivalent of a whisper.)

Although diopsids prefer communicating via light pulses, their vocal organs are capable of producing the speech of other races, and many have learned to speak Undercommon or other language. Diopsids have no spoken racial language of their own.

Diopsids are Large-size creatures, standing 7–7½ feet tall. Their size and appearance often intimidate other races, and most diopsids (especially warriors) take full advantage of this effect, often acting meaner and fiercer than they really are. A favored tactic is to spread their elytra (the hard, outer sheath covering their gauzy wings) wide, causing them to appear much larger. This tactic works well against non-intelligent animals and many intelligent ones smaller than the diopsids. All diopsids, regardless of character class, tend to glory in combat, although they don't take this feeling to outrageous extremes—a diopsid knows when to flee from a stronger foe and sees no shame in the act.

Because of their rather short lifespan (compared to those of other races), diopsids tend to be impatient and hate waiting above all else. In the manner of many insects, they do not sleep but remain motionless in extended periods of rest. Thus, diopsids are favorite lookouts during the sleep shifts of mixed-race adventuring parties, for their compound eyes are incapable of closing, and diopsids remains aware of events in their vicinity even when in rest status. Furthermore, because of the way their compound eyes are built, a diopsid enjoys a 270° panoramic view at all times; its only "blind spot" is the 90° arc directly behind it.

Diopsids are fascinated by new types of weapons, especially since they have no metalsmithing abilities as a race. Most diopsids take their weapons from the corpses of slain enemies, and the

Diopsid Proficiencies & Kits

Weapon Proficiencies: Club, Dagger, Javelin, Short Sword, Longsword, Two-Handed Sword, Spear, various Polearms. A diopsid warrior (only) eschewing the use of a shield can use two two-handed weapons at once. Diopsids are fascinated by weapons of all sorts, and they go to great lengths to master a wide variety of weapons. Nonwarrior diopsids are allowed one weapon proficiency not normally permitted to members of that class.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended*: Alertness, Blind-fighting, Close-quarter Fighting, Direction Sense, Drinking, Eating, Natural Fighting, Survival (Underdark), Wild Fighting.

Available Kits: (Warrior) beast-rider (diopsid beast-riders invariably ride giant boring beetles or subterranean lizards), myrmidon, savage, wilderness warrior (PHBR1), mine rowdie, pit fighter, sellsword (PHBR10); (priest) fighting-monk, savage priest (PHBR3), shaman, war priest (PHBR10); (druid) guardian, hivemaster, savage, wanderer (all diopsid druids are from the gray druid branch; see *The Complete Druid's Handbook* for details); (rogue) adventurer, assassin, scout, thug (PHBR2), scavenger, tunnel rat, shadow (PHBR10).

Diopsid Basic Game Information

Ability Score Adjustments. The initial ability scores are modified by a +1 bonus to Strength and a –1 penalty to Charisma.

Ability Score Range

Ability	Min	Max
Strength	8	19
Dexterity	6	18
Constitution	6	18
Intelligence	3	18
Wisdom	3	18
Charisma	3	17

Class Restrictions

Class	Max Level
Fighter	12
Druid	6
Shaman	9
Thief	12

Diopsid thieves adjust their thieving abilities as follows: +5% to Pick Pockets, +10% to Detect Noise, –15% to Read Languages. (Diopsids have no written language of their own and find the concept puzzling.)

Diopsids can become fighter/thieves, but shamans and druids do not multiclass. Diopsid druids are members of the gray druid branch, as detailed in *The Complete Druid's Handbook*.

Hit Dice. Diopsid PCs receive Hit Dice by class.

Alignment. Diopsids tend toward neutrality, although PC diopsids can be of any alignment.

Natural Armor Class. 4. Because of their tough, chitinous exoskeletons, diopsids cannot wear armor, although they can improve their armor class by wearing magical rings, amulets, and other such items. Diopsids can use shields, often crafted from the wingcase of a dead diopsid. A diopsid wingcase shield improves the bearer's AC by 1 point against melee attacks and by 2 against missile attacks.

Average Height and Weight. *Height*: 78 + 2d8. *Weight*: 200 + 5d10. Unlike many races, there is little or no difference in height and weight between the sexes among diopsids. In fact, most other races are unable to even determine the difference between diopsid males and females; diopsids find this highly amusing, as the differences are quite obvious to them.

Age. *Starting Age*: 3 + 1d4. *Maximum Age Range*: 20 + 1d8. *Average Maximum Age*: 25 years. Middle Age: 10 years. *Old Age*: 15 years. *Venerable*: 20 years.

discovery of a new type of weapon brings diopsid warriors flocking from all over to study this new means of inflicting harm upon one's enemies. While diopsids are often loners by nature, they are always willing to help others of their race master a new weapon proficiency.

Diopsids fear the surface world and all that it entails. In the diopsid cosmology, the surface world is the place of eternal punishment, where the poor souls dwelling there must suffer the random effects of changing weather, the burning sun and endless skies of day, and the vast pool of stars at night. Diopsids view creatures from the surface world with the same dread that most races feel toward the undead: as strange, unnatural things intruding upon the normal order. Until they learn otherwise, diopsids attack such abominations that dare to enter the Underdark, the world of the living.

Diopsid tales tell of daring warriors who braved the horrors of the surface world to prove their fearlessness. Diopsids wishing to prove their worth (as a rite of passage into a band of warriors or to win the affections of a desired mate) can elect to enter the World Above and bring back the head of one of the foul beasts that live there. Such visitations earn a great deal of respect in the diopsid community.

The diopsid views on other subterranean races are skewed by their love of exotic weaponry. The illithids, for instance, are scorned for their general lack of weapons use; diopsids do not understand their preference for mind powers over physical weapons. (This doesn't mean that diopsids see illithids as pushovers. They respect and even fear the mind flayers' psionic abilities; they just realize there's little point in dealing with an illithid.) Drow, on the other hand, are respected as manufacturers of adamantite weapons. Diopsids, even good-aligned ones, usually have no ethical dilemma in consorting with the evil drow, seeing them primarily as an excellent source for magical weapons. (Whether this is through trade with the drow or by slaying drow warriors and looting their bodies afterward depends upon the individual diopsid.) To a lesser extent, duergar and kuo-toa are tolerated, although diopsids greatly prefer drow weapons above all others.

Special Diopsid Advantages

- Having four arms, diopsids can attack with two weapons and still use a shield each round without penalty.
- Diopsids have infravision to a range of 120 feet. Unlike many subterranean races, they are not discomfited by bright lights.
- If forced to fight without weapons, a diopsid inflicts 1–3 points of damage with its claws. It gets two such attacks per round.
- Although diopsids have wings, they are not strong enough to allow them full powers of flight. They do allow the diopsid to slow a fall, however; in such instances the effects are the same as a *feather fall* spell.

Special Diopsid Disadvantages

- Because of their insectoid body structure, diopsids are unable to wear boots, slippers, shoes, gauntlets, gloves, helmets, robes, or belts/girdles (except possibly those made for giant-sized humanoids, although wearing a belt prevents the diopsid from spreading its elytra, thereby precluding the use of its wings). Their compound eyes prevent them from employing any of the magical *eyes* (such as *eyes of minute seeing* or *eyes of the eagle*).
- Unlike many insects, diopsids cannot walk along walls and ceilings. Members of the rogue class can learn to climb as well as any other character races, though.
- In addition, few people seeing a diopsid for the first time are likely to assume it is an intelligent being; as a result, diopsid PCs receive a +4 penalty to initial reaction checks.
- Diopsids have bestial appetites and require twice as much food as the aver-

age human at every meal. Diopsids don't handle food rationing well at all; they suffer a temporary –1 penalty to their Strength and Constitution scores any time they miss a meal.

• Diopsids suffer damage as Large creatures.

Sapromnemes (Fungal Ghosts)

Sapromnemes (SAP-ro-neems), or fungal ghosts, are a normally non-intelligent type of airborne fungus, similar to a gas spore. They have more of a jellyfishlike appearance, however, with a broad central mass similar to the cap of a toadstool from which depend twenty or so thin tentacles. The cap holds two black eyespots along its rim, granting the creature 60' infravision.

Sapromnemes move by an innate form of telekinesis, hovering up to 10 feet above the surface of the ground. A sapromneme stretches about 6 feet from the top of its central mass to the tips of its tentacles; its central cap has a diameter of about 3 feet.

Sapromnemes reproduce only in death, exploding into a puff of spores when slain. The spores drift off in the currents of the Underdark; those fortunate enough to land on a dead organism break down its decaying flesh and expand its form into that of a fully grown fungal ghost.

Those spores that happen to land upon a slain intelligent being do more than just absorb the nutrients from its body; they also absorb the slain victim's memories and intelligence. When fully grown into the jellyfishlike form of a sapromneme, the creature has, for all intents and purposes, the mind of the dead being whose decaying body gave "birth" to the fungal ghost. Many sapromnemes believe themselves to be reincarnations or magically altered versions of their "predecessors," somehow polymorphed into their present shape.

Intelligent sapromnemes have an unconscious ability to alter their own bodies during the growth stage, twisting their normal growth to create a pair of vocal organs and a lunglike organ deep in its cap, through which it can "speak." Sapromneme speech is stilted and strange, with little tonal quality and no inflections (modern-day listeners would compare a sapromneme's voice to that of a robot), but it allows the fungus-being to communicate with others, and even allows those sapromnemes with spellcasting predecessors to cast spells with verbal components.

Sapromneme tentacles are highly flexible and dexterous; they serve admirably in place of hands. Sapromnemes have no difficulty "translating" remembered hand movements into the proper tentacle movements, whether the action be swinging a sword or casting a spell with somatic components.

As fungal lifeforms, sapromnemes eat by absorbing nutrients from decaying flesh through their tentacles. They can also "drink" through their tentacle tips. (This allows them to drink the contents of a magical potion vial.)

Sapromnemes have no racial language. Once a fungal ghost achieves consciousness, it "remembers" the initial language spoken by its predecessor. If the predecessor knew more than one language, the sapromneme can remember only one of the languages at first but can recall additional languages as it increases in level. Languages must be purchased with nonweapon proficiencies as per the normal rules.

A sapromneme can be played in one of two different ways: Either the creature knows what it is, or else it believes itself to be its predecessor, somehow warped in form.

In the latter case, the sapromneme spends much of its time trying to find a "cure" for its present condition. It hates what it has become: a lowly form of life no better than a flying mushroom.

Sapromneme Proficiencies & Kits

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, as allowed by character class, with an overall length of 6 feet or less. Longer weapons are difficult for the sapromneme to wield, as they play havoc with a sapromneme's ability to balance itself telekinetically. A sapromneme patterns its weapon selection upon that of its predecessor.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Recommended: Alertness, Artistic Ability, Blind-fighting, Close-quarter Fighting, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Endurance, Forgery, Herbalism, Hiding (usually above, among stalactites or the shadows of cavern ceilings), Observation, Reading/Writing, Survival (Underdark).

Available Kits: (Warrior) mine rowdy, sellsword, wilderness protector; (wizard) hedge wizard, humanoid scholar; (priest) oracles, war priest; (rogue) scavenger, tunnel rat, shadow. Note that sapromnemes believing themselves to be transformed humans or demihumans will not have a humanoid kit but possibly the kit of their predecessor instead, as allowed by the situation and the DM.

The Sapromneme Resurrection

A sapromneme represents a unique way for the DM to return a player's favorite PC to the party once slain. Perhaps the Underdark adventurers have recently lost a dwarven fighter to a fall down a seemingly endless chasm. The other party members grieve their fallen comrade but never expect to see him again, for retrieving his body would be nigh impossible. Imagine their surprise when several weeks later a fungal ghost floats up to them, claiming to be none other than their old pal Bjorgas Battleblade, ready to pick up where he left off!

Sapromneme Basic Game Information

Ability Score Adjustments. A sapromneme PC gains a +1 bonus to Dexterity and suffers a –2 penalty to Charisma.

Ability Score Range

Ability	Min	Max
Strength	3	15
Dexterity	6	18
Constitution	3	15
Intelligence	3	18
Wisdom	3	18
Charisma	3	16

Class Restrictions
All sapromneme class restrictions are based on those of the creature's predecessor's race.

Hit Dice. Sapromnemes receive Hit Dice per character class but have a "cap" of 8 hit points per die. That is, a sapromneme fighter rolls 1d10 for its hit points, and a roll of 8, 7, 8, 9, or 10 is treated as a 8.

Alignment. Sapromnemes can be of any alignment, depending upon the alignment of their predecessor.

Natural Armor Class. 9.

Average Height and Weight. Height: 65+1d12. Weight: 10+1d4. Sapromnemes are asexual.

Age. Starting Age: 1 year. Maximum Age Range: 55+1d10. Average Maximum Age: 60 years. Middle Age: 30 years. Old Age: 40 years. Venerable: 55 years.

These PCs offer an interesting roleplaying challenge, as the sapromneme repeatedly insists upon searching for a way to reverse its transformation, a quest that cannot be achieved (although it might be possible with *wish*-level magic, at the DM's discretion). These fungal ghosts often have the sharpest memories of their "former life," and they have difficulty accepting that things are no longer what they were.

Sapromnemes that realize that their intelligence is the result of having devoured another's memories use their predecessor's life as a template and pattern themselves after the predecessor to the best of their ability. They do not, however, believe (or expect others to believe) that they are the same being. Their predecessors are revered in a manner similar to ancestor-worship, although sapromneme priest PCs worship their predecessor's deity. (Whether the deity accepts the worship of the sapromneme depends upon the individual deity; most recognize fungal ghost priests as they would the predecessor.)

Many sapromnemes (especially those aware of their existence as a separate, fungoid species) are heavily superstitious, giving great credence to the whims of Fate. After all, they realize that it was only a matter of luck that their spores happened to land where they did and provide them with a self-awareness, even if it is patterned after that of a deceased individual. How easily they could have landed elsewhere, on the non-intelligent corpse of a lower animal or upon some barren rock somewhere!

A sapromneme's opinions of other Underdark races is heavily influenced by the opinions of its predecessor. A fungal ghost with the memories of a surface elf, for instance, is not likely to have much regard for the drow. Similarly, a sapromneme whose dwarven predecessor was killed by duergar might have an irrational fear of or hatred for members of that race. Oddly enough, intelligent sapromnemes do not seem to enjoy association with other fungal ghosts; since each intelligent sapromneme has the memories of a member of a standard humanoid species, the sight of a floating, jellyfish-like mushroom-being seems strange to them. (Most of these sapromnemes avoid mirrors for the same reason.)

Special Advantages

Sapromnemes are immune to all other fungal-based attacks, including the spores of yellow and russet mold and the touch of a violet fungi's branches. They are likewise immune to cold-based attacks, magical or otherwise. Their innate ability to hover at a height of up to 10 feet above the surface below them allows them to pass harmlessly over covered pit traps and even bodies of water. They can "climb" a wall by staying in contact with the wall's surface with their tentacles and hovering upward. As fungoid life, they do not require air to breathe (although air must be present to allow them to speak aloud).

Special Disadvantages

Because their telekinetic flight depends upon a lightweight body, sapromnemes cannot wear armor or carry significant amounts of weight. (Fifty pounds is about the maximum a fungal ghost can carry and still maneuver.) Because of their body structure, they cannot wear most magical items, although the DM should allow magical rings to be worn at the tip of a tentacle. (The standard maximum of two magical rings being worn at the same time should likewise be enforced.)

All sapromnemes give off a slight smell of decay, noticeable within a 10' radius. They feast upon decaying flesh; their odor is worsened immediately after having consumed such fare. These traits, combined with the fungal ghost's alien appearance, combine to create an initial reaction penalty of +4.

Zygodacts

Zygodacts are curious creatures of dubious appearance and unknown origin. They stand upright on two long, armored, insectoid legs jutting out from a thick carapaced body similar to that of a tortoise. Their most distinctive features are their upper appendages, however: Extending from where a turtle's forelegs would appear are two thick but sinuous stalks, ending in a combination head/hand. The stalks are retractable, capable of being pulled almost fully into the zygodact's carapace.

The head/hand extremities of a zygodact can perhaps best be visualized as follows: Imagine a human hand giving the Vulcan "Live Long and Prosper" salute (fingers splayed so that the pointer and middle fingers are together, as are the ring and pinkie fingers). Bend the wrist forward so the fingers are pointed at you, and bend the thumb down so it's below the index and middle fingers. Now add a second thumb under the other two fingers, so the whole hand is more or less symmetrical. On the tips of the middle and ring fingers add a glistening, shiny black eye, and in the center of the palm add a

Zygodact Proficiencies & Kits

Weapon Proficiencies: As allowed by class, with the following restrictions: A zygodact cannot use any two-handed weapons, as using both arm/neck appendages to wield weapons effectively blinds them. Zygodacts generally do not have the strength in their upper appendages to successfully employ hurled weapons (like javelins and spears) that gain their thrust from the strength of the wielder's arm, although slings can be employed to full effect.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: *Recommended*: Animal Lore, Close-quarter Fighting, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Endurance, Forgery, Gem Cutting, Jumping, Leatherworking, Natural Fighting, Observation, Reading/Writing, Running, Seamstress/Tailor, Spellcraft, Survival (Underdark), Wild Fighting.

Available Kits: (Warrior) berserker, gladiator, myrmidon, wilderness warrior (PHBR1), tribal defender, mine rowdie, pit fighter, sellsword, wilderness protector (PHBR10); (wizard) academician, militant wizard, mystic (PHBR4), hedge wizard, humanoid scholar (PHBR10); (priest) berserker priest, fighting-monk, scholar priest, (PHBR3), war priest (PHBR10); (druid) beastfriend, guardian, wanderer (all zygodact druids are from the gray druid branch; see *The Complete Druid's Handbook* for details); (rogue) adventurer, assassin, bounty hunter, scout, thug (PHBR2), scavenger, tunnel rat, shadow (PHBR10).

Because of this love of magic, the vast majority of zygodacts are wizards, priests, or multiclassed characters with wizard or priest as one of the classes. Zygodact fighters and thieves tend to be of overall lower intelligence and are looked down upon by spellcasting zygodacts. This "spell snobbery" does not carry over to the other races, since they have hard enough lives trying to cope with only one head, the poor things!

Zygodacts view magic with an almost religious awe; as such, they greatly fear areas where magic does not work. Dead magic zones are cursed places to be shunned at all costs; a wizard cloaked in an *anti-magic shell* generally sends a zygodact fleeing in the opposite direction. Beholders are one of the most feared of all creatures, because of the *anti-magic ray* effect of their central eye. (Disenchanters, from the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® *Annual Volume Three*, are similarly feared.)

Even magical items like *wands of negation* or *rods of cancellation* are seen as inherently evil and corrupt; zygodacts of all classes destroy these foul items whenever possible.

The zygodact love of magic influences their relationships with other Underdark races. Races that are heavily involved with spellcasting or the production of magical items are favored over those less inclined to walk the paths of magic.

Special Advantages

Zygodact wizards begin their careers heavily armored; not many 1st-level wizards can wade into battle with Armor Class 3! Their thick carapaces allow zygodacts to suffer only half damage from falls and blunt weapons.

In addition, their double vocal chord arrangement allows each head to speak the verbal components of a given spell simultaneously. Many standard spells have been adapted by zygodact mages or priests to incorporate two sets of verbal components (one spoken by each head, simultaneously) in place of using material components. The DM has the final say as to which spells can be modified in this way, but a good rule of thumb is to allow it of any spell whose material components are valued at 10 gp or less. Zygodact spellcasters otherwise conform to the standards of the class: Zygodact wizards record spells in spellbooks, zygodact priests carry holy symbols, and so on.

Finally, all zygodacts have infravision to 120 feet in each of their four eyes. They are not discomfited by bright lights as long as they have their nictitating membranes in place.

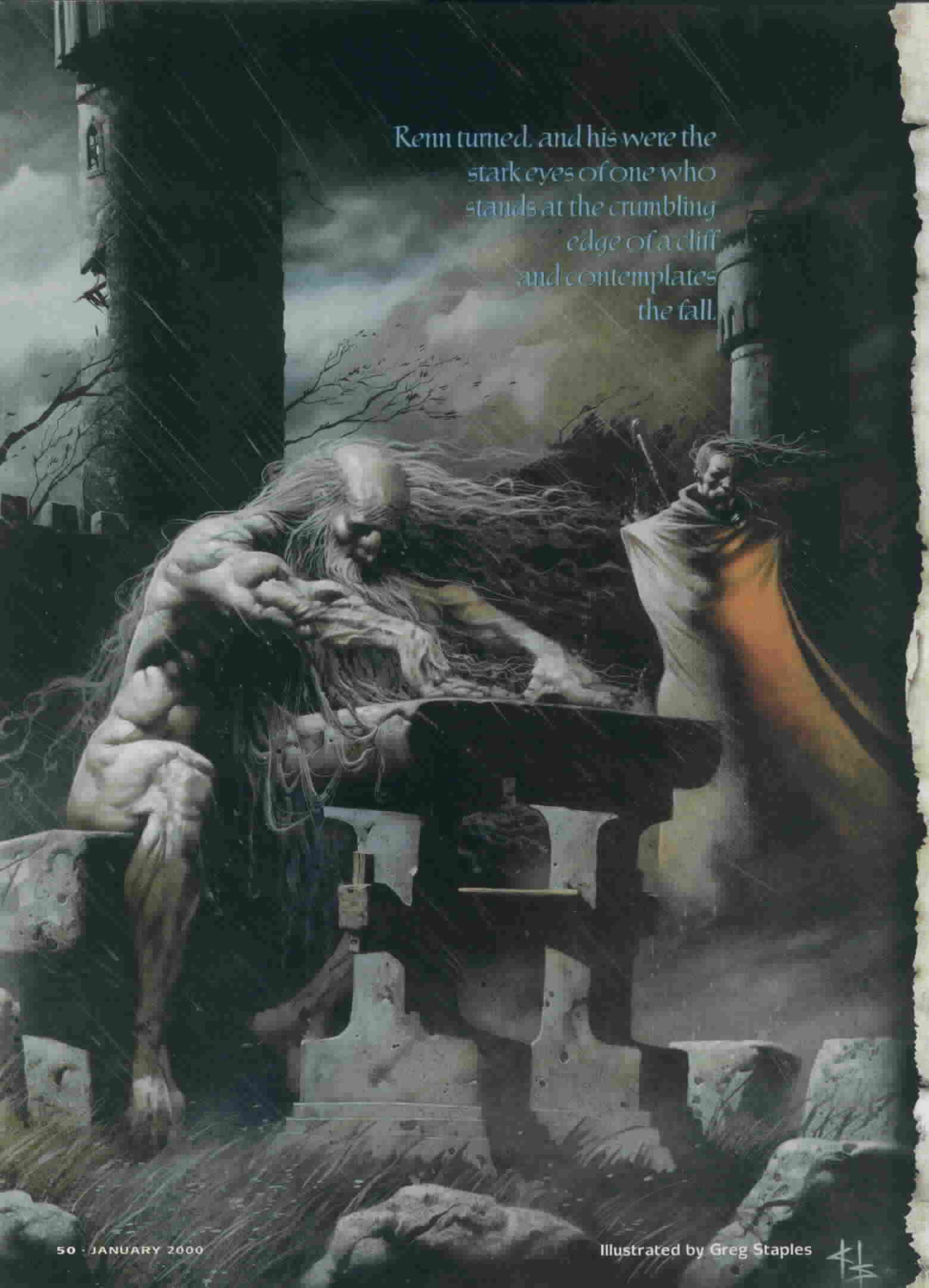
Special Disadvantages

Because of their body structure, zygodacts are incapable of wearing armor, and it is impractical for them to use a shield. In addition, zygodacts cannot wear many of the standard magical clothing items: boots, hats, helms, robes, gloves, gauntlets, slippers, and girdles. While they are capable of wearing magical bracers, most zygodacts prefer to keep their arm/neck appendages unclad, since wearing bracers inhibits their ability to pull their appendages into their carapace. Magical cloaks and rings remain about the only items of magical apparel open to the zygodact.

Zygodacts are poor climbers, as they can usually devote only one upper appendage to the task. Climbing up a rope is nearly impossible for a zygodact. Since a zygodact wears no clothing, any carried objects must either be held in a hand/head appendage or strapped onto the creature's body somehow. Fortunately, the zygodact's insectoid legs are somewhat knobby, allowing pouches, weapons belts, and the like to be strapped onto the sides of the legs.

Finally, a zygodact's unusual appearance causes a +2 penalty to initial reaction rolls.

Johnathan M. Richards refers to the library/den where he does all of his freelance work as "the cave." His wife, Mary, fears that with as much time as he spends in his "cave," he's likely to qualify as a member of an Underdark race himself before long.



Illustrated by Greg Staples

Fiction by
Nancy Varian Berberick

The Knight's Watch

She did not scream when she read the message from the High Clerist Tower, and she did not faint. She was the daughter of a proud house, the widow of a noble Knight of Solamnia, and the liege lady of four broad estates. She did but scan the creamy parchment, the bold marching letters of her brother-in-law's missive, biting her lips to bleeding.

"... And so I ask, sweet Vanore, my brother's beloved wife, that you send me again what you sent thrice before, a son to take the place of his proud father. Send us Renn ..." So Ainsel uth Fallan had written, doing what he had promised to do, months before at Yuletide when he'd taken Vanore and her son aside from the festivities to talk of war and trouble.

Then, while folk yet celebrated the victory over the dragonarmies, Sir Ainsel had spoken grimly of the unease of the Knights. "For I tell you Vanore," he said, "the peace born of that victory is young. In the Dargaard Mountains, the armies of Takhisis are ready to burn all treaties in their lust for the sweet lands of the Vingaard River valley. Already people wonder how soon these incursions into Solamnia will encourage dragonarmies everywhere to pour out from their fastnesses to begin the war again.

"You were your father's squire," said Sir Ainsel, turning from Vanore to her son. He'd lifted the Yule cup in salute, Renn had returned the gesture. "And I hear it said that no hunter is better than you, no rider more daring, no wrist stronger to hold the sword. One day, nephew, you must come and finish what you started. You must come be a knight."

Renn had said that no other thing did he want so badly as this, and hearing him, Lady Vanore knew he lied. She knew, for she'd stood beside him on the day her husband and sons were returned from the battlegrounds. In the bitterly bright sunlight, she and Renn had watched as flies swarmed their wounds. Her husband's right arm had been ripped from the shoulder, and one of her sons had come home with his own head tucked under his arm, another so hacked by sword and ax that only his knightly crest identified him, the fair embroidery of Vanore's own hand. The third, the youngest knight, was unmarked by any wound but one — his heart had been cut from his breast.

Vanore knew it: These ravaged knights, his father and his brothers, haunted Renn's every dream. He did not say so, and he need not have spoken a word about it. She discovered Renn's fear in secret hidden glances, his terror in the dark shadows beneath his eyes, and she welcomed it as if it were a weapon strong in her hand. She would not let him join his kin in death, she would not stand again in the hall and weep over her dead. Never, she vowed, would she be summoned to look upon her beardless boy as he lay upon his bier.

Whispering dryly, the vellum sheet bearing Sir Ainsel's message fell from Lady Vanore's fingers and drifted to the floor. Renn fetched it. "Mother," he said, "my uncle has written to call me to the Tower."

"Yes." Vanore folded the letter in half and slipped it into the pocket of her red gown. "Yes, my son, but you will not go." His breath caught in his throat. What was that, disappointment? Vanore eyed him closely, and saw it was. Since that day in the courtyard, with the flies buzzing and the wounds gaping, he'd been living with fear and sleeping with dread. Vanore shivered. Perhaps it was that his noble blood, the blood of heroes, cried to him that he must test his heart now, test his courage or die in the attempt.

She lifted her head, her gaze chill. "I am a woman who has sent three of her children to die, a woman who saw her own dear lord brought home in his gore. Renn, I will not send you to your uncle."

"But, mother, I promised—"

She dismissed his promise with a shrug. "I have lately had news from Coastlund. They need me there, at Swan's Rest. You will accompany me, and there we will stay" She looked out the window to the gardens where the sunlight of a warm summer's day lay full and golden on fragrant herb beds. "It's time you saw the Coastlund estates, for they will be part of your inheritance one day."

He would be lord, his father's heir, the son of a long line of proud men. In dark days and fair, the Whitelakes had been knights. They served to the very life's blood of their dearest sons, and the name Whitelake was spoken in the same bright tones as the words "honor" and "pride." No more. Lady Vanore had given enough. She touched Renn's cheek, gently as she used to do when he was a child.

"You are still young," she murmured. "Your uncle will find the men he needs. Others will stand in the breach. In Coastlund you'll see it is as important for lords to hold the lands as for knights to defend it."

Renn said nothing, though the blood rose to his face. Vanore looked past her son's silence and did not show that she saw the fear in his heart or felt his relief when he acceded to her command. She simply left him.

In that way she started what was to follow, though she did not know it then.

Thunder harried them, rolling down the sky like echoes of the war many in Krynn celebrated as over. Lightning flashed, bleaching the green from the lush Plains of Solamnia, turning the landscape ghostly white. The true strength of the storm raged far behind, still tearing around the broad lands between the south arm and the north arm of the Vingaard River.

"Are you all right, mother?" Renn shouted, his voice barely heard above the sound of the horses running.

"Ride on!" she cried, leaning low over the foaming neck of her dappled mare. She dug her heels into the mare's flanks and shot out ahead of Renn. She was as one chased by phantoms. She'd driven her son and herself mercilessly these three days gone, riding hard and resting little. They had twice encountered travelers, once a group of men and women gaily decked and heading for Teasel, the largest village in the district.

"We're going to be wed," said one of the men, his hand upon the rosy shoulder of a doe-eyed young woman. They stood in a flower-starred meadow, yarrow and daisies and yellow petaled black-eyed maidens waving 'round the hem of the bride's skirt. "Come travel with us and we'll all make a merry journey."

Vanore declined, but she gave the bride a ring from her own hand. "A token to bring you happiness," she said. She hoped she would be buying luck, that one day she would see so fair a maiden on her own son's arm.

They rode on through Teasel and round the bounds of Lancallan. Vanore would have ridden by the light of the two moons if Renn had not pleaded for the horses. After lean meals, she slept hard, as soldiers in the field sleep. At times she woke to see her son tending the campfire and looking north to the high mountain pass warded by the High Clerist Tower. There squires were being forged into knights, and knights were being sent out to the eastern borders to fortify the Dargaard Mountains against the restless armies of the Dark Queen.

"And I am here," Vanore heard him whisper, once to the fire and the night. His face shone pale in the moonlight, pale even under Lunitari's glow. The lady's heart trembled. She had known his father when he was only a little older than Renn was that night. Renn was like him, a handsome youth with hair the color of wheat, eyes blue as steel. Her heart ached for her lost husband and her sons, and they were, all of them, present when she looked at Renn. The dread that drove her every day since leaving River's Ward pounded in her then: Renn will find his heart and go to be with his uncle. He will go to die ...

And then she remembered the corpses in the courtyard and the boy who knew he must take their places one day. She thought, both ashamed and comforted: He will not go. He is his father's son only in body, not in spirit.

Dark rose the castle's ruined towers, the brave walls crumbling. Rain fell in swift silver sheets, running down the walls, tumbling along the thick ivy. Like grasping hands, that ivy clung to the stone, gouging out mortar to shatter the thick gray blocks. Before the travelers lay only the jagged walls of the ancient fastness, like a black crown flung down by the hand of a wrathful god. All around rose up the stone of Hard Run Pass, that narrow way through the Vingaard Mountains.

"Whatever lords held this castle," Renn said, "must have done a good business in tolls."

"Perhaps their only business," Vanore murmured. "It doesn't seem they had much farmland tax."

Nor would the lords of this place have needed that. In times when the towers rose tall and the stout walls stood, travelers would have found no way past this fortress that did not involve unchancy mountain trails and crumbling paths. The lords here might well have been toll-takers, or they might have been robbers, happy to ride out to raid and come back to enjoy their stolen treasures. Those days had long passed, though. Now any could run round the walls or go with impunity through the castle itself.

Vanore saw no campfire's glow to warn that another had come to shelter, but Renn would not go carelessly. He slid his sword from its tooled leather scabbard. Horses ran on that scabbard, long necks stretched, manes flying. One bright topaz glinted on the weapon's grip. Sword and scabbard, they had been a Yearday gift from his uncle, three summers gone, to celebrate the thirteenth anniversary of his birth.

One day, the accompanying note had read, a missive hastily scribed by firelight, in a battleground tent, you will lift your sword beside me in battle, nephew, as your father did.

At sight of the sword, Vanore pulled tight the folds of her heavy cloak. She hated to see it in his hand, and yet it was his birthright. He knew the use of it, had a good strong wrist and a keen eye. All the best teachers of River's Ward had been his, old soldiers who believed they were training the son to follow the father. Renn and Vanore knew better. They had guilty secrets: he the unspoken fear, she the nurturing of it. Renn glanced only once over his shoulder at Vanore as he went into the ruin.

The mountains rising up narrowly had been this castle's best defense, but the lord of that place had not left all to nature. He built his castle as though it were sitting upon the grassy Plains of Solamnia, not wedged into this tight pass. Two baileys, broad cobbled courtyards, greeted the visitor, their stout oaken doors long down from the gates, the wood rotted in years past, or gone for fires. Lady Vanore

followed her son through the outer bailey, across broken cobbles. In the silver flashes of storm-light she saw piles of stone, granite blocks fallen from the walls to lay, some shattered, others not, in hunches and piles around the walls. Weeds ran up through the broken paving. Young trees stood boldly, silent sentinels.

Within the inner bailey they found traces of ancient gardens, plots overgrown with weeds yet still shaped in rounds and rectangles as though waiting for tamer vegetation. Broad stone steps climbed into a hall that once made up the whole well of the castle. High up, on the eastern and western walls, galleries showed as deeper pockets of darkness. The far gallery had fallen, the stone of wall and floor now lying where once the lord of this place had sat upon a dais to feast.

"Come," Renn said, leading Vanore's mare up the stairs and into precincts never meant for the horse. "We're under roof at last!" Gently he lifted her to the ground and tucked her hand into the crook of his arm. "We'll find you a good place in the hall, my lady."

She smiled, for that was the old greeting of her husband's hall, one she was herself used to offering travelers who came to the castle. Come, we will find you a good place in the hall.

Renn led his mother under shelter. By the light of the storm he found kindling beneath the east gallery overhanging, old branches, winter-fallen, and the leaves of autumns past piled up in corners. With steel and flint he made a careful fire. When the flames leapt high he brought Vanore to sit near. He took bread and cheese from their saddle bags, one leather water bottle nearly full, and a wineskin untouched. The food he rationed carefully, and he gave the most to his mother though he swore his own portion was as large.

"I'm going to eat it on my feet," he said, passing the wineskin after the merest sip made to look like a hearty swig. "We haven't enough wood to light the night through, and I want to find what I can."

Vanore drew off her wet wool cloak and stretched it over a pile of stones to steam beside the fire. Though she was weary from travel, she didn't like the loneliness of the place. The fire notwithstanding, it held no cheer. And so she took up a brand and followed Renn through shattered chambers. They wasted no time looking for furnishing to break up. Not the least stick of oaken chair, cherry table, or mahogany coffer remained in this broken castle. All had been long ago pillaged. They looked, instead, in courtyards, places where branches would have fallen, windswept into the dry places beneath sagging eaves.

"Come see," Renn called, standing at a wide breach in the castle's north wall.

Vanore went close and lifted her torch high. Outside the breached walls of the hall a ring of stone sat in a small courtyard. It was the foundation of a narrow tower, not the kind that might have been part of the castle's defense but simply a place set apart for the sake of a lord who liked his peace, a lady who craved solitude. Vanore's heart lurched hard against her ribs. They were not alone in this castle ruin. Someone sat within the circle of the broken foundation, quietly, unmoving in the rain. Ignoring her detaining hand, Renn slipped into the courtyard.

Walking carefully, his hand on the grip of his sword, Renn approached the circle and the lone figure sitting there. Vanore could only follow, the flames of her torch streaming behind. In a flash of lightning she saw two eyes shining, two eyes fixed upon her son.

"Renn, wait," she whispered.

He did not. He took a step toward the circle, the stones like gapped teeth. He slipped his sword from the scabbard, but he did not raise it. With quiet steps, Vanore went to stand beside him, her own breathing the loudest thing in the night. Renn handed her his torch, and for a long moment she stood, letting her eyes adjust to the darkness. Then, groaning, she cried, "Ah, gods, what woe is this?"

Vanore's heart lurched hard against her ribs. They were not alone in this castle ruin.

The one who sat in the circle of stone was a dwarf, bound in such a way as Vanore could not have imagined.

"O Guardian of Light" Renn whispered. "Paladine, be merciful ..."

Vanore's hand on his arm tightened, but he shook her off and went closer to the circle.

The dwarf's bright eyes held Renn's, brown and keen and very old. Vanore barely breathed as she watched her son, the boy standing straight and tall. Upon the walls of all his father's castles knights stood thus, stone-carved, frozen in frieze. Her blood chilled to see him thus gripped by the glance of one who might have been a son of any one of the dwarven nations, from Kayolin in the Garnet Mountains, or from the hills around the Kharolis Mountains, even from far Thorbardin.

"Renn," she whispered. "My son, come away."

He didn't even shake his head. He simply stood, watching the dwarf.

The dwarf sat upon a stone bench, before a stone table. His hands, gnarled as the roots of an ancient oak, spotted with the marks of age, lay as though at rest upon the table. On the middle finger of his right hand the dwarf wore a ring, an ugly thing, rough and made of stone as though someone had drilled through a chunk of granite and only smoothed it enough to make it round. Otherwise, he was unadorned, plain as the stone on his finger. His pate showed brown as a nut in the wake of receding hair. His beard, gray as iron, grew thickly down from cheeks and chin, and it grew right into the stone of the table. So strongly did his beard grow that small cracks appeared in the granite, the hair of the dwarf's chin as strong as the eternal fingers of ivy that, year after long year, work to shatter even a castle wall.

The Knight's Watch

Brown eyes shone, and Vanore knew the tears on the dwarf's face from the rain. She saw them spill. "Dwarf," she said, "who are you?"

He said nothing, did not move, and never took his eyes from Renn. The sky grew quiet as the storm receded. In the last restless wind, flames streamed out from the torches as she thrust the brands into the cracks between the broken cobble stones.

Renn's breath caught, a rough sigh. He stepped closer.

"Renn, what will you do? Have care — "

"I'm going to cut his beard free of the stone." He lifted his sword, the blade running red with firelight.

The moment he stepped closer to the circle, Vanore heard a footfall behind them. Low and cold, a deep voice said,

"Stand away from the circle, boy. Move away from the dwarf."

Renn turned, sword high. "Who goes? Speak your name!"

Like shadows separating from the night, a tall man in a black cloak walked out from the breach in the castle wall. As he walked, he put back the hood of his cloak, revealing a pale, handsome face of elven cast.

"I am Dalamar Nightson," the elf said. He inclined his head.

Renn lowered the tip of his sword. "And I am —"

The elf-mage waved his hand, dismissing the courtesy as unimportant. His cloak parted slightly to reveal a black robe, the plain wool unmarked by decoration. Dalamar Nightson was no adept of Solinari or Lunitari. The hair raised up prickling on Vanore's arms. Here was a follower of Nuitari, the god whose mother was dread Takhisis herself.

"Stand behind me, mother," Renn murmured, putting himself between the mage and his mother.

Head cocked, Dalamar smiled, if such a mirthless tugging of lips can be named a smile. "Are you thinking, boy, that you've fallen in with some minion of the Dark Queen?"

Renn's shoulders stiffened, he bristled at the belittling form of address. "I am Lord Whitelake of River's Ward," he said, coolly as the elf. "This is my lady mother, Vanore of Coastlund and Solanthus. A man might be tempted to ask why you fare so far from the lands of elven, but you need not tell your tale to me, sir mage. Your raven's gear speaks it clearly"

The mage Dalamar raised an eyebrow, but he did not trouble to deny what was plain to see. By virtue of their ancient custom, no gods but Paladine and his bright kin reigned in the elven nations. All those who chose for other gods were cast out, exiles to wander the roads of the world. In all lands, people know them as dark elves, elves fallen from the light.

"An outlaw." Dalamar spoke as one who probes an old wound. "You sneer to say it, but what's true is true."

He shrugged as though he spoke of someone not himself. Vanore had got a good education in the ways of the world, so she knew the pain this dark elf pretended did not exist must be considerable. They are the most insular of folk, the elves of Krynn.

"Yes," said the mage, not to the woman who observed him so keenly but to the boy beside the stone circle. "I am an outlaw, but don't let my dark robe frighten you. I am my own man, no tool of the Dark Queen. If you give me no reason to harm you, I will not. Now, I have asked you once, and I say again: You and your lady mother must stand away from the circle and the dwarf."

Vanore moved, ready to do as the mage wished. She wanted only safe shelter here, only the night's peace. The matter of the dwarf seemed to be the concern of mages, and that made it no concern of hers. But Renn wore the stubborn look of his father. Head high, shoulders braced, he said, "We go nowhere until you tell me why we should, Dalamar Nightson."

The mage took one long stride toward the circle of stone. Renn lifted his sword.

Dalamar's laughter rang round the ruins, harsh as a crow's cry, cold and scornful. "Lo, the bold son! Had you not better do what your mother wishes?" Renn's grip on the sword tightened. The elf's bolt had struck home. "So. Will you strike me, young squire?" Not waiting for an answer, he bent and picked up a pebble from the ground, one among many in the rubble. "Now put up your sword, and watch."

With a careless flick of his wrist, Dalamar tossed the pebble into the circle.

Light changed within the embracing stone, rippling like water. The cobbled ground rumbled. Vanore felt the humming in the soles of her feet, right through her boots and then into her bones. The dwarf shuddered, and his brown eyes grew wide. A sudden jerk of pain convulsed his body.

"Stop!" Renn cried. "What have you done?"

"What?" said Dalamar. "Were you looking only at the dwarf?" He shook his head, as over the inattention of a slow student. He took up another pebble, and this time he scribed a rune in the air above it, a shining symbol that vanished with his next breath. He tossed the pebble, sent it arching high over the circle. "Now," he said, his voice grim as iron, "watch the circle."

Arcing high, the pebble hung for an impossible moment over the ruined foundation, all the air around it shivering. The dwarf screamed, though no sound came out from him. What sound could possibly issue from a throat so long closed?

"Mage," Vanore cried. "Stop this cruelty!"

Instinctively, Renn turned his head. The mage's hard hand grasped him by the back of the neck. "Look where I tell you, boy," Dalamar snarled, forcing him to look away from the dwarf and to the air in the circle.

The pebble hung, suspended upon an invisible rune. Vanore's own cry rang through the ruin as the stone table, the little bench, the imprisoned dwarf himself vanished.

"Look," whispered Dalamar, growling in her son's ear. "Look deeper!"

Howling rose up from the circle. As in a mirror, Vanore saw dark figures running. Some screamed, while others stood, mouths stretched wide and soundless. She saw killing, rapine, dire couplings among creatures she could not name, beings

whose skin had been flayed from their bones, others whose arms were wings, more whose legs were the trunks of trees grown rooted into stone. Steam hissed up from cracks in the earth, foul vapors that burned the flesh of all it touched, made skin run like tallow, muscles crisp and curl from bones. An elf-woman, her silver hair changing to snakes in an arcane wind, clawed at her face, the flesh of her cheeks, even at her eyes.

"They are mad," Dalamar whispered. The ground quaked. Renn tried to move his head. The dark elf held him hard, forcing him to look where he willed. "They are mad," said the mage, "and their every demented thought becomes reality. They are sorcerers."

Keening turned to speech, to words, obscenities and vile epithets, hideous threats and hymns to lunacy.

Struggling, Renn tried to escape the mage's grip as, beneath their feet, the ground settled. Cold in his ear, Dalamar hissed, "Still, be still."

Renn held, and Vanore stood shuddering to see the sweat streaming down his neck. All was again peaceful in the circle, the dwarf returned, sitting with his hands upon the stone table. "Dear gods," Vanore whispered, her voice ragged as one who had been a long time screaming, or a long time weeping. Fingers of breeze caught her hair. Only then did she realize it hung loose around her shoulders, fallen from the clasp of pins and combs that always kept it held high and off her neck. Shuddering, she thought of the elf-woman, her silver hair tumbled, her flesh rent by her own fingernails. "Mage, what is that place?"

"They are mad," said the mage, "and their every demented thought becomes reality. They are sorcerers."

"Have you not guessed? The circle is a portal. The dwarf is a guardian at that gate. As long as he sits in perfect stillness, none of those madmen may pass through." He glanced at the dwarf and then away. "And, of course, no one from here may enter, for if one of us were to do that, the little shivering you saw from a pebble's disturbance would be as nothing. "He looked at Renn and then away as from one of no reckoning. "Such disturbance as your son would have made would cause the gate to collapse and the dwarf to die."

"Those howling madmen, they are mages of Krynn who walked or stumbled through the gateway a long, long time ago. They are," he said, musing, "like torches being endlessly consumed by fire, so strong is the magic running through them, heart and mind and soul. If they came back here —" Dalamar shook his head. "Imagine it: madmen sorcerers whose magic flies as the storm flies, bursting on all they encounter as lightning over the mountains. They would lay waste the land around and before all was sung. That war we have lately seen would be only a footnote in the histories of Solamnia and Coastlund."

Renn shivered, and Dalamar spared him not even a glance. "Madam," he said to Vanore, without the slightest trace of irony, "you are white as ghosts. No doubt your journey through the storm tonight has wearied you." He gestured over his shoulder, into the darkness where only the faintest orange glow shone. "I see your fire is sinking. Come, I have a few small skills at fire-craft."

He took Vanore's hand. She let him tuck it in the crook of his arm neatly as any courtier might. In that way they left the ruin, the dwarf and his tears running. Once Vanore glanced back, though, and shivered to see the dwarf's brown eyes upon her son's back.

"The dwarf's name is Yearden." Dalamar leaned a little forward, his palms over the falling fire. He spread his fingers wide and lifted his hands. The flames followed tamely, rising to grant light and warmth. "That means 'warden' where he comes from."

"Where is that?" Vanore settled into her cloak, wishing it were thicker.

"Thorbardin, madam. A long time ago."

Renn gave the dark elf food, bread, and cheese, and he gave him the flask of wine to drink. Dalamar supped in silence. Two dark leather bags sat near to his hand. Unadorned by more than sterling buckles, they bulged fat in square bulk.

Books, Vanore thought, or cases and coffers. Renn glanced at them.

"Ah, you're curious," said the dark elf, handing the flask to Renn. "Well, I'm a treasure hunter, of sorts. I don't seek the kind of treasure most would like to find, trinkets and baubles and caskets filled with steel coin. I hunt mage-trove."

Renn said nothing. He passed the flask to Vanore and settled.

"It seems," the lady murmured, "that you've had good luck, sir mage."

Dalamar shrugged. "Not here, I haven't." Absently, he traced a rune in the thin film of dust covering the fattest of the black leather pouches. "These things I found in other places, fallen towers and ruined cities. The swag of ages, madam: a book of charms penned by an elf in Silvanesti before our people divorced, a scroll filled with spells composed in the Age of Might, a talisman crafted in the deepest warrens of Thorbardin; it will shine the light of a fierce god's eye into your heart and inflame such passions as few have ever known."

"You've come to loot, then," she said, her voice chill.

The elf's pale face grew whiter, his eyes narrowed. The least of them, the elves of Krynn, considers himself of greater worth than any lord in the world outside their forests. Doubtless, Vanore thought, Dalamar considered her disdain as the impertinence of a serving girl.

Renn stirred, and Vanore's eye went to him. Hidden in shadows outside the light of the fire, he had eyes for Yearden, behind them in the dark.

The Knight's Watch

"I came to this place," Dalamar murmured, "for only one thing." He looked away, into the darkness where Renn did. "An ugly little ring no one would think worth a second glance."

"What property does the ring have?" Vanore asked. "What magic will it work?"

He stretched out long legs. Firelight and moonlight gleamed on black boots of Ergothian leather. No expression touched his face, his features composed in perfect stillness as he considered whether to answer.

"Madam," he said at length, "legend has it that the ring was created by a woman's tears, a million tears falling, drop and drop, upon a little granite pebble until they finally hollowed the stone. The power it lends is the power of weeping and stone: the power to feel one's own most secret pain, the power to discover one's own most secret strength."

Moon shadows ran, flowing on the ground as clouds flowed in the sky. Cold in her belly, Vanore felt understanding dawn. "That ring," she whispered, "has kept the dwarf alive."

Dalamar nodded. "For a very long time, but it does not make him immortal. Yearden is dying."

Renn caught his breath, sharp surprise. He turned from the night, his cheek white in the fire's light. "How do you know? How can you know?"

Dalamar cocked his head, honestly curious. "Can't you feel it?"

Vanore put her hand to the ground, the cobbles through which rough weeds bristled. In the same moment, Renn stretched out his fingers, pressing his palm hard to the stone.

"No," said Dalamar, looking at Vanore, speaking to Renn. "Gently, gently."

Pressing gently or roughly, Vanore felt nothing but wet broken stone beneath her hand. She sat back, her hand withdrawn, but Renn eased the pressure, and an expression passed swiftly across his face, his eyes tightened as though he had a great and sudden urge to weep. Thus had Lady Vanore seen him look when he'd stood before his father's bier and those of his brothers, the knights wrapped darkly in funeral gear.

"What you feel," said Dalamar with gentleness so far strange to him, "is the dwarf mourning his own death."

"And what," Vanore asked, afraid of her question, compelled to know, "what will befall when Yearden dies?"

Pale of face, dark of eyes, Dalamar turned to her. "Madam, what you saw in the circle, that glimpse into another plane, would spill out into our plane."

"But what must be done? Something must be done ..."

He didn't deny that, but he didn't reply. In his silence lay the answer. There must be, at all times, a guardian at the gate.

Came a sigh of wind. Renn lifted his head, and he looked right into Dalamar's eyes. The dark elf smiled, a scant lifting of the corner of his mouth. A thing passed between them, Vanore's heart tightened painfully to see it.

Moonlight and shadow spun strange veils of light as Vanore came out from the broken hall and into the little courtyard where Yearden wept at the gate. Renn didn't turn when he sensed her behind him, he didn't speak. He stood, shoulders braced, watching the dwarf.

"He must have used all his store of courage to step in there. Don't you think so, mother?"

She said she thought the dwarf must, indeed, have spent his heart in the doing.

After a long moment, his tone oddly flat, Renn said, "When first I saw him — this Dalamar Nightson — I thought he was a ghost. I thought he was my father in his funeral garb." Flatness twisted to bitterness. "Do you think a son's cowardice haunts a ghost, mother?"

He spoke thinking to wound her. He might have done that had Vanore been unaware of her own part in fostering his fear. But she had worked with purpose in the years since all her sons were dead but him. Carefully, she'd murmured easy excuses into her child's ear, and they all had the same reasonable theme: We have lost enough, we Whitelakes, and must not bear the loss of our last, our dearest son. It is the sacred duty of a lord to rule his manors for the sake of those who depend upon him. She was not stung when he rebuked her.

"Renn." She touched his arm, he pulled away. "Your father would not reproach you. Don't you think he would take joy in knowing his son is alive?"

Renn turned, and his were the stark eyes of one who stands at the crumbling edge of a cliff and contemplates the fall. "No. I think my father mourns me, mother. And I know you are ashamed of me."

Fear clutched her heart with cold grasp. She reached for him again, again he pulled away. Into that moment came the scent of heady oils and herbs and dried rose petals. Dalamar stood behind, and he kept the moment's silence as Renn returned to watching Yearden's tears, the silver running on old, old cheeks. Then, soft he said, "Don't you want to know, boy?"

"Know what?" Renn asked, as though they two were the only ones standing in that darkness outside the circle.

"Don't you want to know when he'll die?"

"Soon. I felt that when I felt his grief. Can you tell me more than that?"

Dalamar couldn't, or he wouldn't.

"What about you, sir mage?" Vanore asked, wanting to break the closeness of this conversation, mistrusting him all in a moment. "Will you stay till the dwarf does die?"

His dark eyes glittered restlessly. "And do what, madam? Take his place? I couldn't do that if I wanted to." He nodded to the dwarf and the circle enclosing. "That is no post for mages, for not even the best of us would stand long before the temptation of turning and stepping into a world that would drive us mad. And I'm thinking I don't want that ring as badly as I once did." He glanced at Renn, and then away. "Or not enough to see Solamnia and Coastlund laid waste."

Renn turned, and his pale, strained expression told Vanore it was harder to break the dwarf's gaze than to look into Dalamar's strange dark eyes. "Yet you have been here longer than tonight, and so I reckon it you're waiting. For someone?"

"For someone." Old leaves tumbled lazily across the courtyard, the wind whisked none past the circling stones. Dalamar nodded to the dwarf. "For whoever will come and take his place. And I pray to dark gods often that someone will."

Again, the wind sighed and so like a mortal voice was its sound that Vanore turned to look at the dwarf thinking that, at last, he spoke. Of course, he did not. His throat had long ago lost such strength as was needed to carry voice. And yet, looking, she understood a thing she hadn't before. Yearden's were not tears of pain. They were tears of sorrow.

Soft, she said, "Dalamar, who will come? Do you know?"

Dalamar shrugged. "How could I? A week ago I didn't know the dwarf existed or that this place did. But here they are, guardian and gate. And here I am, waiting."

"Why do you wait?" he asked. "If you don't want the ring now, what do you want?"

"I want to see what lies beyond the gate, boy. I want to slip in, and slip out again. In the moment of the dwarf's death, in the breath before another takes his place, I want to taste what power is found in a world where even the air breathes magic."

Vanore stared at the elf. "Are you mad?"

Dalamar considered that seriously. "No. I have taken risks for my magic, madam. I have walked on paths the Silvanesti don't walk, prayed to gods whose names my people consider curses. I have wandered all the roads of Krynn searching for magic, more and stronger and ever deeper. I don't test my courage on small things. That might be madness seen from the outside. It isn't — Look!" he said, his voice suddenly hushed. "The dwarf has stopped weeping."

Yearden, ancient guardian, sagged, his shoulders caving, his head falling hard, chin to chest. Soundless, he tumbled to the stony ground. Vanore cried out and turned to see Renn leap into the circle of stone.

"No!" Her cry was a long winding wail. "Renn! No!"

Close beside, as though he had foreseen the move, Dalamar went with him, and it was like they'd leapt into water, light and darkness spraying up and all around, holes being torn in the substance of the world, as splashed water, falling, pocks the surface of a pond. Rose up a wild howling, a screaming of voices and winds and madmen. Into that Vanore plunged, a step behind them, unable to keep away. She reached for Renn, plucked at his sleeve and he shook her off. In that place, in that roiling, howling place, she saw rage in her son's eyes, a fire to consume all the fear she'd fed him.

Beneath her feet the ground quaked, then heaved, knocking her to the ground. Crawling, tangled in her skirts and stumbling, she crept to Yearden's side. She took his arm, his withered hand, and reached for a pulse. She found only stillness, and tearless eyes. He was dead.

A shout of dread and triumph, Dalamar's cry, rang out as the air shivered, then shattered. A dark figure burst through into the circle, a madman screaming whose face was a mass of eyes, all roving and staring in every direction, whose arms were flames. Behind him, on the other plane, more of his luckless kind ran, clashing each with another in arcane battle. Then one saw the way through, soon another.

"Boy!" Dalamar shouted. "Draw that sword! It works here!"

Renn's sword flashed in the shuddering air, bright and keen. Blood ran dripping down the blade as the first sorcerer flung himself upon the weapon, embracing the steel as it pierced his breast. Renn turned, and turned again, seeing Vanore near.

"Mother! Stay where you are!" he shouted. He leveled the sword at her, panting.

Dalamar laughed. His dark eyes shining, he took his own chance. He ran for the rift, the gate between the worlds. Crying one word of magic, he filled his hands with fire and flung it, a flaming ball, at the next mage to come out of the rift. Flesh sizzled, the acrid stink of burning hair filled the ruin. Dalamar edged closer to the way out, the way in.

A shout of dread and triumph, Dalamar's cry, rang out as the air shivered, then shattered.

Renn backed up, putting himself between Vanore and another of the sorcerers, the snake-haired elf-woman.

"Keep still, mother," Renn ordered.

She dared not move, and perhaps that looked like obedience to him. In her arms the dwarf lay light as ash, his ancient body withering as each moment passed. The stone chair, the stone table, these vanished like so much mist rising to the sky. The guardian was gone from the gate.

Renn lifted his sword again, the bright blade dripping red. The snake-haired sorceress was blind now, her eyes gone from her face. Had she clawed them away? Had she dreamed them gone? She came for him, and each step she took turned the cobbles beneath her feet to molten slag. Caught and held, the flesh burning from her feet, she screamed, in agony and in an ecstacy of magic. All around, as her voice ran, the stones of the circle melted, like lava they ran.

Shrieks of glee, howls of pain, terrified laughter filled the world, a storm of madness. In all those voices one rose up to pierce the chaos.

"Renn!" Vanore cried, "We must leave here!"

He heard her, but he did not heed. Dalamar stood before the rift, the dark elf on the edge of here and there. A wind out of the magical plane caught his cloak and flung it back like raven's wings. As Renn turned and saw him, Dalamar gathered himself, making ready to leap, to test his courage on no small thing. All around the stone melted, and towers ran like candle wax. On the blade of Renn's sword a mage's blood ran, hissing when it touched the ground.

"Dalamar!" he shouted. "Get out! Now!"

His cry rang round the melting ruin, reverberating from dying stone. The mage hung in the moment. Like that

rune-marked pebble he'd tossed, he stood between one chance and another. Something howling hit him from behind; something with too many arms and too many legs swarmed all over him, snarling, laughing, clawing. Renn leaped; sword high, he ran. He hacked the head from the creature, the madman sorcerer, and black blood ran, pouring onto the burning stone. Arms jerked, legs twitched in spasm. Dalamar heaved up, shoving the thing from his back.

"Too late, mage!" Renn pointed to the widening rift. Beyond others gathered, slavering, yelling, shrieking mad curses and wild spells. "Too late! If you're caught in there, you'll spend the rest of your life insane!"

"If I go and come back — "

The dark elf's words fell into stillness, into silence. Beyond the gateway, they held, and no madmen came through. Renn looked around him, and Vanore, frozen in fear, the ashy corpse of the dwarf still in her arms, knew what each of them did. Shivering she saw it: Her son stood in the exact center of the circle, of the ruined foundation. He stood where a guardian might stand, in that place where none could approach and not see him. A look came on him of sudden fear, and then settling peace. He glanced at the mage, then turned his eyes to his mother.

Breath held, she thought he would say something to her. His lips never parted to speak. He turned, and he lifted his sword. He put the tip of it to Dalamar's throat.

"Leave," he said. Staring along the length of the steel, he said, "Leave, mage. Now."

One lightning look passed between them, and then the dark elf knelt beside Vanore. Mage-scent drifted from the folds of his robes as he lifted Yearden's hand. Dalamar slipped the ring from the finger that was not but bone now, that bone crumbling as the ugly granite talisman left it.

Eyes on Renn, he rose, but Vanore rose with him, and she stopped him.

"Give me the ring," she said.

He looked at her once, and deeply. Understanding passed between them and he put the ring into her hand. He helped her to her feet, and carefully Dalamar moved the middle finger of Renn's right hand, lifted it not enough to disturb the grip.

"Do it well, madam," he said.

Her boy! Her child! Sweat ran on him, the pulse beat wildly in his neck. He stood in a glorious madness of courage the like he had not known before. Ah, but Vanore had known it, not in her own heart, but in the eyes of three sons and the man who'd sired them. Renn was, standing there, weaponed and determined, the true kinsman of those knights. None who saw him could doubt, and seeing him, Lady Vanore knew her sin. She had kept a good man from his heart, from his destiny. But he had found another fate, and this doom she dared not keep him from. Before her heart could counsel otherwise, she slipped the stone ring onto the finger of her last, her dearest son.

Stillness settled upon the circle, like a sigh the silence of madmen. Dalamar inclined his head, a proud man's bow. "I salute you, my lord," he said in a voice that might never have known irony or scorn. Gently, he took Vanore's hand and led her from the circle.

In the great stillness, in the silence pressing against her eardrums, Vanore watched Renn ground his sword. The tip touched the stone. The light of the silver moon touched the topaz on the grip, waking it to shine. A breeze somewhere sighed, that strange, voiced breeze. She heard Renn's name, his name upon the zephyr, quietly whispered.

"I am here," he said, not to Vanore nor to Dalamar. He spoke to the gateway, to all the guardians who had stood watch at this rift between worlds. "And here I stay."

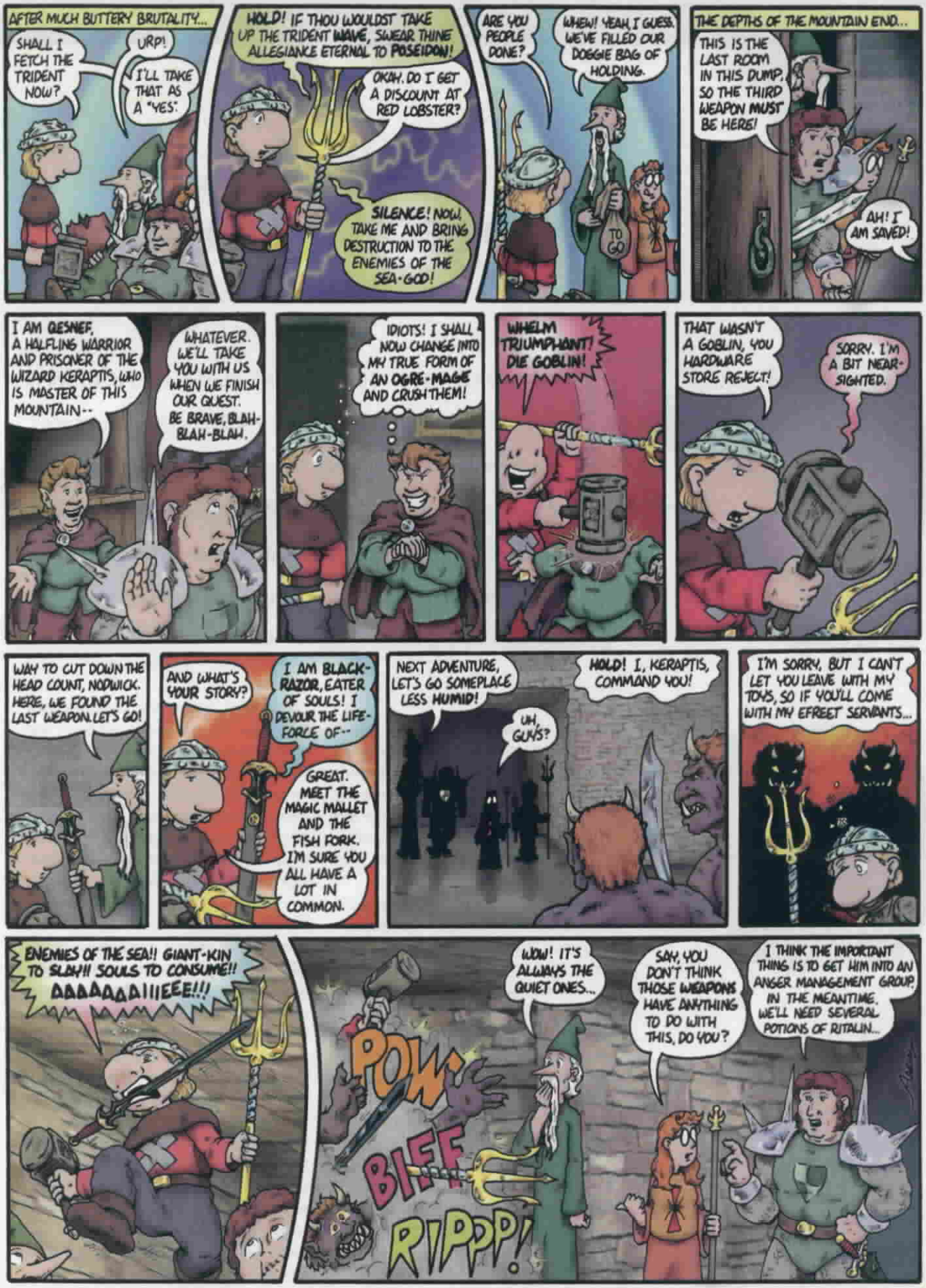
Vanore of Coastlund and Solanthus watched her son's hands grow stiff upon the grip of his sword, that gift of his uncle who would not now receive him in the High Clerist Tower. She did not watch alone, for Dalamar Nightson kept her company. Not put off by losing the treasure of the ring of stone and tears, he searched the ruin for what he'd been pleased to call the swag of ages. Vanore hardly knew he was there. Sometimes, in daylight, he would come and say it would be better if she left the ruin. Betimes, at night he offered the same advice. Vanore did not take it. Weeping, ceaselessly as Yearden had, she watched her son standing in the center of the circle, the round etched out in melted stone of a tower's foundation. He resembled those carvings so often seen in graveyards and mausoleums, the traditional carvings upon caskets and coffins, a knight standing tall, a knight at ready watch.

He stood, her true son of his knightly father, and the pain of standing, of never moving, not even breathing, washed over him like fire that would melt him. She said as much to Dalamar, once when he came to bid her away. When he asked her how she could know that, she answered coldly, "Am I not his mother? Can I not read his every expression?" He said, "I see," but she didn't imagine that he saw anything about it. He was a mage, dark and powerful, but that was not a mother's heart beating in his breast, not a father's soul weeping in him. He had not seen his child take up the task no one should have to bear, he had not handed that child over to the cruel work himself.

Vanore stayed beside the stone circle and she wept until she had no more tears. A day and a night and another day passed. Then, on the third morning, with the new sun rising behind her, she saw a thing she had not seen in all the days of her son's life. Her beardless boy was not, now beardless. A small glint of down showed on his cheek, on his chin.

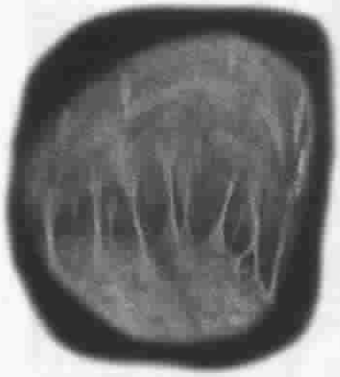
Nancy Varian Berberick has written several fantasy novels and short stories including the new DRAGONLANCE® *novel,* Dalamar the Dark, *chronicling the legendary exploits of the dark elf wizard Dalamar Argent. The novel releases this month.*

Nodwick in:
Climb Every (WHITE PLUME) Mountain
YEAGAR, I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT WORKED! THE ANSWER TO THE SPHINX'S RIDDLE WAS "THE MOON."
YEAH, SO?
SO, IF I HAD BEEN THE GUARDIAN, I WOULDN'T HAVE ACCEPTED YOUR DISPLAY OF FRUSTRATION AS THE ANSWER...
...BESIDES, THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE GOING TO DISPLAY YOUR SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE, GIVE US SOME NOTICE!
JUST BE GLAD THE RIDDLE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH MATH!
WHAT THE--?
HMM-- A DARKNESS SPELL.
GUYS! MY STAFF IS DETECTING EVIL! A VAMPIRE IS NEAR!
GOT HIM!
TAKE THIS!
STAKE!
SAY, YEAGAR, DO VAMPIRES GENERALLY HAVE NOSES THE SIZE OF GRAPEFRUIT?
WHOOPS! ARTAX, GO GET PIFFANY AND HER DUCT TAPE.
FOOLS! I HAVE EASILY EVADED YOUR CLUMSY ATTACKS!
NOW I SHALL DRAIN YOU OF EVERY DROP OF BLOOD!
EVADE THIS.
HOLY SCREED SOFTSER
KA-SPLOOSH!
THAT WAS FUN! WELL, IF YOU'RE DONE RESTING, NODWICK, YOU CAN GO GET THE HAMMER OVER THERE, AND WE CAN GO HUNT FOR THE NEXT WEAPON!
KNOW YE THAT I AM WHELM, ENEMY TO ALL WHO BE GIANT, TROLL OR GOBLIN-KIN! THOU SHALT WIELD ME TRUE AND SMITE MY FOES!
UH, GUYS? DO WE REALLY NEED TO GO AND FIND THE OTHER TWO ITEMS?
YUP! C'MON!
OUR HEROES SEARCH AND MAKE A DISCOVERY.
LOOK! THAT MUST BE THE TRIDENT!
BEANS OF COOLNESS! TWO DOWN AND ONE TO GO!
NOT TO RAIN CURSED ITEMS ON YOUR TREASURE HOARD, BUT YOU MIGHT WANT TO SLOPE OUT WHAT'S GUARDING IT.
WHOA...
DOES EVERYONE HAVE WHAT THEY NEED?
CRAB CRACKER +5!
DECANTER OF ENDLESS BUTTER!
BIBS OF PROTECTION!


AFTER MUCH BUTTERY BRUTALITY...
SHALL I FETCH THE TRIDENT NOW?
URP!
I'LL TAKE THAT AS A "YES."
HOLD! IF THOU WOULDST TAKE UP THE TRIDENT WAVE, SWEAR THINE ALLEGIANCE ETERNAL TO POSEIDON!
OKAY. DO I GET A DISCOUNT AT RED LOBSTER?
SILENCE! NOW, TAKE ME AND BRING DESTRUCTION TO THE ENEMIES OF THE SEA-GOD!
ARE YOU PEOPLE DONE?
WHEW! YEAH, I GUESS. WE'VE FILLED OUR DOGGIE BAG OF HOLDING.
TO GO
THE DEPTHS OF THE MOUNTAIN END...
THIS IS THE LAST ROOM IN THIS DUMP, SO THE THIRD WEAPON MUST BE HERE!
AH! I AM SAVED!
I AM QESNEF, A HALFLING WARRIOR AND PRISONER OF THE WIZARD KERAPTIS, WHO IS MASTER OF THIS MOUNTAIN--
WHATEVER. WE'LL TAKE YOU WITH US WHEN WE FINISH OUR QUEST. BE BRAVE, BLAH-BLAH-BLAH.
IDIOTS! I SHALL NOW CHANGE INTO MY TRUE FORM OF AN OGRE-MAGE AND CRUSH THEM!
WHELM TRIUMPHANT! DIE GOBLIN!
THAT WASN'T A GOBLIN, YOU HARDWARE STORE REJECT!
SORRY. I'M A BIT NEAR-SIGHTED.
WAY TO CUT DOWN THE HEAD COUNT, NODWICK. HERE, WE FOUND THE LAST WEAPON. LET'S GO!
AND WHAT'S YOUR STORY?
I AM BLACK-RAZOR, EATER OF SOULS! I DEVOUR THE LIFE-FORCE OF--
GREAT. MEET THE MAGIC MALLET AND THE FISH FORK. I'M SURE YOU ALL HAVE A LOT IN COMMON.
NEXT ADVENTURE, LET'S GO SOMEPLACE LESS HUMID!
HOLD! I, KERAPTIS, COMMAND YOU!
UH, GUYS?
I'M SORRY, BUT I CAN'T LET YOU LEAVE WITH MY TOYS, SO IF YOU'LL COME WITH MY EFREET SERVANTS...
ENEMIES OF THE SEA!! GIANT-KIN TO SLAY!! SOULS TO CONSUME!!
AAAAAAAIIIEEE!!!
POW
BIFF
RIPPP!
WOW! IT'S ALWAYS THE QUIET ONES...
SAY, YOU DON'T THINK THOSE WEAPONS HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THIS, DO YOU?
I THINK THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO GET HIM INTO AN ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP. IN THE MEANTIME, WE'LL NEED SEVERAL POTIONS OF RITALIN...

Designing Dungeon Monsters

What does it take to survive in the Underdark? These monsters know, and now you can too.



by Gregory W. Detwiler

illustrated by Bob Klasnich

MANY AD&D® ADVENTURES TAKE PLACE IN DUNGEONS and caverns, and they usually involve fighting monsters, many of animal intelligence. The "perfect dungeon monster" doesn't necessarily mean the "perfect character-killer." Instead, it's a creature adapted to living in underground environments. The monsters described in the following pages are nonmagical animals specialized for life in a subterranean world.

Diet

Because life tends to be scarce underground, subterranean monsters tend not to know where their next meal is coming from. Thus, herbivores are rare, unless an underground volcanic vent or the like provides heat for fungi, mosses, and so forth. As a result, omnivores make ideal cave-dwellers.

Fantasy worlds often have rock-eating creatures, many of which hail from the Elemental Plane of Earth, such as the xorn. These "lithivores" (stone-eaters) can be fun, but they present a problem. The metabolism required for digesting rock means that normal carnivores probably cannot eat them, leaving them out of the food chain. It would take a specialized predator to prey on them, one that evolved from the same weird realm that produced the lithivores.

Special Attacks and Defenses

Underground carnivores are far more formidable than most of their surface-dwelling counterparts, as they must make the most of every opportunity, even killing and eating creatures their own size. This means larger teeth and claws, causing up to 50% more damage than those of their above-ground counterparts. Swallowing attacks are common, as are poisonous or acidic attacks. Most subterranean creatures also have long spines, heavy armor, or an immunity to poisons of all sorts.

Treasure

Creatures of animal intelligence generally don't hoard treasure, making them less popular with the characters who must fight them. A rare few are inquisitive or attracted to bright objects such as gems, coins, and glowing magical weapons. Aside from this handful, most dungeon animals collect only "incidental" treasure: stuff left lying around after they've killed and eaten their victims. Depending on how extensive your underworld is, these finds could still turn out to be quite a haul. Also, don't forget the treasure, particularly magical items, that adventuring bands left lying around when they were wiped out. If

you want your players to explore a treasure-rich Underdark realm where most of the monsters are mere animals, by all means let them do so. Just make sure they have to work to get at the good stuff.

Population

Dungeon populations are spread thinly through the Underdark. This is particularly true of creatures that are Medium-size or larger; these monsters should rarely be encountered in groups of more than a half-dozen, while the really large ones appear singly or in pairs at most. Only creatures of Small Size should be encountered in large numbers: bats, rats, and so on. As a rule of thumb, the small animals should appear in numbers comparable to those of creatures such as stirges and giant rats.

When dealing with creatures of animal intelligence, only the little ones have anything like a complex social organization. A nest of giant ants is likely to be the the most sophisticated "society" among Underdark animals. Due to the scarcity of food, Large and Medium creatures are almost always solitary wanderers or lurkers, even if they have the intelligence to create more complex groupings. Since there is not enough food to support them in large numbers, they will not be present in large numbers.

Activity Cycles

In the eternal darkness of the Underdark, there is no daily rhythm to mark the passage of time. Consequently, the animals that dwell there can be active at any time of the "day" or "night"; such concepts are inconceivable for dungeon monsters, and probably even for intelligent races that have never visited the surface world. If the creatures can see, sunlight makes a major difference to them, while even blind creatures notice a change in temperature between day and night. Thus, monsters that leave the caverns to raid the outside world eventually time their hunting for the nighttime hours once they overcome their initial confusion. As surface-dwellers are at their best in broad daylight, the specialized navigation abilities (see below) of dungeon monsters will give them a distinct advantage in nighttime hunts.

Means of Navigation

This is another area where subterranean animals can differ radically from their surface-dwelling counterparts. The DM can, of course, have well-lit caverns (see below) so the players don't have to waste time fooling around with relighting lanterns and torches, but this takes away much of the special flavor of the underground realm. Adventurers are intruders here and must suffer accordingly, while the local residents cope in a variety of ways, such as:

Normal Vision: This works best if there are phosphorescent rocks or luminous plants in the cavern. Either that, or the animals carry their own phosphorescent lights with them, like many deep-sea creatures.

Special Eyes: This category can consist of huge eyes that catch and magnify every shred of light, infravision, or seeing parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, like the "ultravision" used in the AD&D 1st Edition.

Echolocation: Navigation by means of sound waves, like bats on land and cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and so forth) in the water.

Scent: Some monsters rely on a heightened sense of smell. Incidentally, crossing bodies of water doesn't always work against these monsters, as the scent lingers in the air above the water.

Touch: The animal has feelers of some sort, such as whiskers (more properly called vibrissae).

Taste: The monster uses its tongue to detect prey.

Telepathy: This special mental power is the hardest detection ability of all to fool.

Adventure Ideas

This article presents three new denizens of the Underdark, each one with special attacks and abilitites that make it a lethal predator in its domain.

Dungeons and caves are a major part of the AD&D game, so it is high time that their monstrous denizens were designed specifically to belong to the world they inhabit. Even in a monster hunt, realism can make the proceedings more enjoyable, and once you throw in a few other elements, you can make this standard scenario an adventure to remember.

It is not true that Greg Detwiler lives in a subterranean lair, nor does he swallow his prey whole. Moreover, we're sure there's a perfectly sound explanation for the missing postmen.

Tunnelmouth Dweller

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)
TREASURE:	Incidental
ALIGN MENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	3, Swim 9
HIT DICE:	10
THAC0:	11
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2–16
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Swallow whole
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Partial immunity to fire (see below)
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	H (20' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (20)
XP VALUE:	4,000

The tunnelmouth dweller is a horrifying predator of dungeon and cavern alike. This creature has a mouth as wide as half the length of its body, ten feet in diameter, the typical width of a dungeon tunnel. The entire animal is a rich deep brown. It finds its way through the Underdark by a means of echolocation; the huge, blank white orbs near its mouth once functioned as eyes for its ancestors.

Combat: The tunnelmouth dweller has only one attack, but it is especially lethal. When it encounters prey while prowling through cavern tunnels or dungeon corridors, it lunges forward, swallowing whole victims of up to Size H. (The monster's skin stretches, so it can swallow prey its own size.) A tunnelmouth dweller can swallow three PCs at once, or four if they're packed together (like a formation of spearmen). Swallowed characters suffer 2d8 points of damage on the first round from the monster's long teeth. In following rounds, victims suffer 1d6 points of damage from the dweller's digestive juices until they either die or are rescued. The only ways to avoid being swallowed are to brace the creature's jaws with a 10'-long pole or a polearm (requiring a successful Dexterity check, assuming the weapon is already in hand) or successfully dodge the snapping jaws.

Swallowed characters cannot defend themselves unless they have short stabbing weapons such as short swords, knives, or daggers. The entire mouth and throat of the creature is slick with a slimy mucus wet enough to extinguish torches and uncovered lantern flames. Any ordinary flame attack that strikes inside the creature's gaping jaws is totally extinguished, while magical fire causes only half damage (one-quarter damage if the dweller makes a successful saving throw). Note that this only applies to those fighting the creature at its front, which is usually the case. If the tunnelmouth dweller can be attacked at its side or rear, fire-based attacks work normally. Of course, since the big-mouthed thing fills the entire width of a typical corridor, getting around it isn't easy.

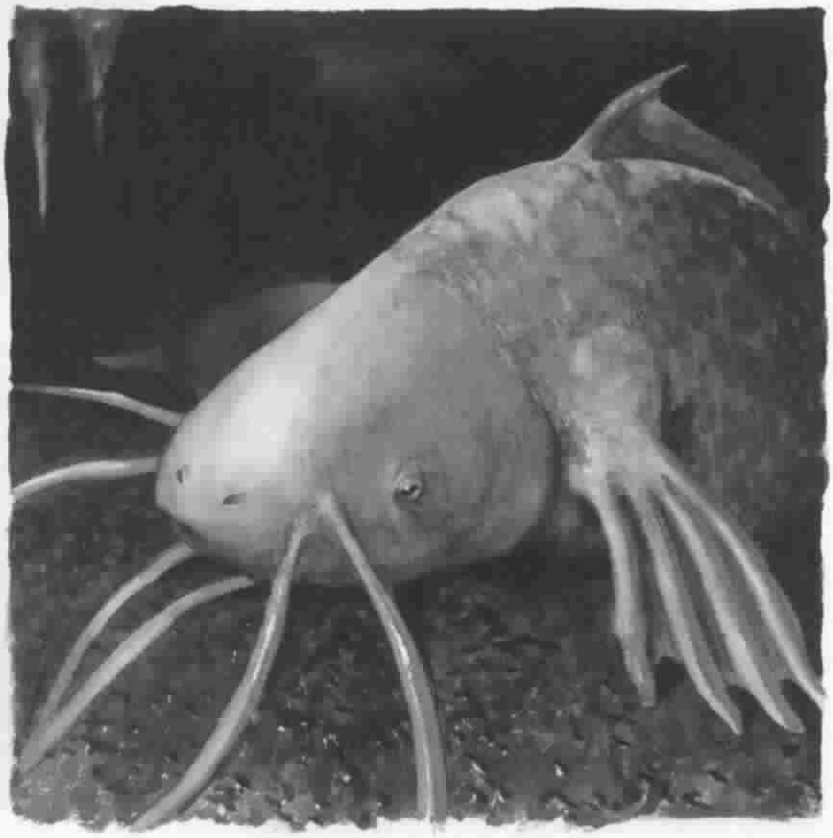
Habitat/Society: Like the majority of true subterranean predators, the tunnelmouth dweller is solitary, meeting peacefully with its own kind only for an hour or so each year for the mating season. After mating, the couple allow each other to leave uneaten, at which time all consideration ceases. If they meet again before the next mating season, even later on the same day, they try to eat each other as they do everything else. (Pity the group caught between two tunnelmouth dwellers in a corridor with no accessible side tunnels.) The females lay clutches of six leathery eggs, of which perhaps one or two hatchlings survive long enough to reach adulthood.

Ecology: Tunnelmouth dweller skin is much in demand among mages seeking to create a *bag of holding*. Its mucus is also used in extinguishing fires, selling for roughly 50 gp a vial. (One vial can put out a single torch, lantern, or campfire.) It keeps no treasure but often swallows adventurers who have valuable items on them. To retrieve these goods, one must either butcher the creature's carcass or pick apart its droppings.

Those who don't know any better buy tunnelmouth dweller eggs at 500 gp apiece but quickly regret their purchase. The young have 2 Hit Dice and are 2 feet long at birth; they grow to full size within 8 months, gaining two more Hit Dice and slightly more than 2 feet in length per month. Because the creature has such a voracious appetite, it is an expensive guardian for any stronghold and usually wears out its welcome among even evil NPCs within a matter of weeks.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Incidental
ALIGN MENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	3, Swim 18
HIT DICE:	12
THAC0:	9
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Swallow whole
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	G (30' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	4,000



The stalking catfish is amazingly adaptable, being able to spend nearly all its time out of the water, walking about on its broad and muscular fins. This enables it to leave isolated cavern pools and lakes to find new prey after it has totally devoured all the goodies in its previous habitat. Although few can appreciate its appearance in the underground darkness, its scales are a gleaming metallic green.

Combat: This land-dwelling fish moves slowly and methodically through the caverns, its 12'-long barbels or whiskers probing everything within reach. Thus, concealing magic is no defense. Whenever even one barbel touches a living thing, an electric impulse shoots automatically to the small brain, and the great fish lunges forward to swallow the victim whole. (It can do this to Size M prey or smaller.) If the target fails to avoid this attack, the target suffers 1d8 points of damage from the creature's teeth and the same amount each subsequent round from its digestive juices. Swallowed prey can attack using short weapons such as daggers and short swords, but only if such weapons are in hand. If outside rescuers attempt to cut the victim free, there is a 50% chance per slice that the blow inflicts half damage—rounding down—to the one being rescued.

The catfish's ability to probe for prey depends entirely on its long barbels; if they are all cut, it is all but helpless in the dark, attacking at a –4 penalty. However, anyone who starts cutting them off at the base will be at most within only a few feet of the catfish's mouth, announcing his or her presence in the strongest possible terms. Severing a barbel requires a successful called shot with a slashing weapon.

Habitat/Society: These fish are solitary for much of the year, but they gather in large numbers in large bodies of water once a year, for a full week, during the breeding season. Depending on how many large bodies of water there are in the region, each pool or lake could contain up to a dozen stalking catfish during the week in question. Because of their voracious appetites, the other life forms in the pools and lakes tend to have greatly reduced populations. This is beneficial to the catfish because their eggs are helpless and vulnerable to any other predator. Each female lays up to a hundred eggs, but no more than four or five reach maturity.

Ecology: Stalking catfish that make their way to the outside world generally become the top predators in the areas they inhabit, unless some truly fearsome monster such as a dragon is already present. In their normal environment, however, they are just another giant predator. If a tunnelmouth dweller gets the drop on one, it works its jaws extensively until the catfish carcass is bitten in two, as the stalking catfish is one of the few rivals it cannot simply swallow whole.

Stalking catfish flesh is delicious, and the meat, whether fresh or smoked, fetches 10 gp a pound in almost any market. The smashed-up gelatinous eggs can also be used to make an "egg cake" of exquisite flavor that costs 20 gp. (The eggs themselves cost 6 gp per dozen but must be submerged in water until used.) The tough but beautiful hide is also prized by fashion-conscious fighters, who would pay heavily to have a wizard form this hide into a suit of *scale mail +1*. A foot-long length of barbel, encased in amber and suitably enchanted, can also be used to make a *wand of enemy detection*; no more than one barbel per catfish can be so enchanted.

Glitterworm

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore (see below)
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal (1)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGN MENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	–1
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	18
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2–20
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Acid jet, camouflage
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Immunity to acid, earth-based attacks
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	G (30' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	16,000

The glitterworm is a massive subterranean predator closely related to the purple worm. However, it has the ability to change color to match any metallic or earth hue; its natural color seems to be slate gray, but this is by no means certain. A long worm with a leechlike mouth, it is one of the few terrestrial predators that preys on creatures from the Elemental Plane of Earth. Unlike its surface-dwelling relative, it is only 5 to 6 feet in diameter.

Combat: After attracting prey by giving itself the color of gold, silver, platinum, or another precious metal, the glitterworm first employs its breath weapon, squirting a jet of acid all over its foe and inflicting 3–30 points of damage, or half that if a saving throw vs. breath weapon is successful. (This acid jet extends to 70 feet and is a uniform 5 feet wide.) Then, as the worm lunges forward, its great leechlike, acid-beslobbered jaws fasten upon the prey, causing 2–20 points of damage each round the glitterworm remains attached. The acid flows freely even after the initial attack, requiring victims to make saving throws for worn or carried items as well. The glitterworm's leechlike grip cannot be broken unless a successful Strength roll is made (at a –1 penalty). Because of its specialized attack and the nature of its toughest prey, this creature is immune both to acids and to all earth-based attacks.

Habitat/Society: Glitterworms are solitary predators, coming together only during the mating season. A couple will meet, intertwine for an hour, then go their separate ways. The female lays a single egg: a lustrous shiny gray orb that is completely inedible to all terrestrial creatures. Creatures of elemental earth can eat it, however, which is another reason why glitterworms go out of their way to destroy such predators. Aside from this, no special care is taken with the egg, and indeed, none is necessary.

Ecology: The glitterworm is the ultimate omnivore, eating not only flesh and vegetation but minerals as well. Indeed, its ability to devour elemental earth is almost certainly an outgrowth of its tendency to eat normal stone. Xorn are favorite targets, and a glitterworm will pass up other prey if a xorn is in the area. Dwarves, gnomes, and other demihumans or humans who delve underground are also regarded as choice fare. It is to attract these two favorite foods that the glitterworm evolved the ability to change colors and odors to look and smell like any type of precious metal, including such rare ones as mithral and adamantite. The intended prey sees what looks like a narrow vein of rare ore, rushes up to start eating or mining it, and receives quite a rude surprise!

Because of various unsavory changes in its metabolism in the course of its evolution, the glitterworm has no natural enemies except on the Elemental Plane of Earth, and even creatures from that plane are more likely to be prey than predators. However, adventurers and evil wizards being what they are, there are many attempts made on these creatures, either to kill them or capture their 3'-diameter eggs to raise guardian beasts. Since a glitterworm can bite into and digest anything with its acidic jaws, it can literally eat its way out of any enclosure not protected by magic. However, fools keep on trying, as a sizeable number of reckless or power-mad wizards are willing to pay 5,000 gp for a single egg. The creature's acid is also much in demand by alchemists. A single vial of the stuff can sell for up to 100 gp.

by Jeff "Zippy" Quick

MARVEL SUPER HEROES ADVENTURE GAME

The Beyonder

Skills:

None

Powers:

The Beyonder has every power at Intensity 30+. Reed Richards has hypothesized that the Beyonder's one limitation is an inability to create a temporal paradox. No one knows whether this is true.

Calling: Explorer (usually)
Hindrances: Naïve, Obsessive (about humanity)
Personality: The Beyonder was perpetually curious during his existence in this reality. Once he had a question, he would try anything from simply asking to destroying a galaxy to find an answer. Being new to life, he seemed unaware of the consequences of his actions and often went overboard in pursuit of answers.

History

In another universe, the Beyonder was all. Then a hole opened to the Marvel Universe, and the Beyonder knew "otherness." Observing this strange new concept, "he" eventually homed in on Earth and watched the varied people and their actions, paying special attention to the superhuman beings. In every living thing, he saw one similar trait: desire.

To study desire more closely, the Beyonder used his infinite power to make a large number of heroes and villains fight. To this end, he created a planet called Battleworld, which was galaxies away from Earth. Then he sent the heroes and villains there and told the two sides, who frankly never needed a reason to fight before, "Slay your enemies, and all you desire shall be yours."

This promise began a long, painful battle known as the Secret Wars. Of course the heroes won, but the Beyonder was baffled by their desires. They wanted simple, kind things, sometimes with no direct benefit to themselves. Further, they did not slay their enemies. The Beyonder granted their desires nonetheless, sent them all home, and retreated to meditate on all he had observed.

Soon after, he returned to Earth in the guise of a human. He wanted to learn all there was to know about humanity. To accomplish this, he asked questions, conquered the world, became a hero, destroyed death, founded a religion, and eventually tried to become human. This last part was his downfall. During the process of the Beyonder's becoming a human, a combined strikeforce of superhumans assaulted his transformation machine, killing the Beyonder—sort of. Rather than die, the Beyonder's energy left the Marvel Universe and went on to create a new universe.

Narrator Notes: How do you run a game with an omnipotent character? Make him a plot device. *Never* give him to a player as a Hero.

What do you do with an omnipotent plot device? You make a point with him. The Beyonder wonders about the big questions in life: Why do good? What is desire? How do I use the bathroom?

Most Beyonder adventures rotate around the Beyonder's misinterpretation of some truth and the havoc that results. Heroes must fix whatever wrong he created in his overzealous quest for knowledge, then explain to him why he got it wrong. Fighting and problem-solving are all by-products of the Beyonder's involvement, but after that comes direct confrontation with the Beyonder, when the heroes must explain some fact or moral truth.

Maybe, when the heroes have to explain *why* they act selflessly, they might re-examine their own motivations … or maybe it's just a good excuse to fight dinosaurs in New York.

30	Strength
30	Agility
30	Intellect
30	Willpower
*	Edge
1	Hand Size

Note: The Beyonder has no Edge, Hand Size, or Health. Given that his abilities are all 30 and could go up from there, the Beyonder can do whatever the Beyonder wants.

MARVEL COMICS

The Eyes Have It

Fourteen new magical items to help you see the light ... or in the dark, or through a lie ...

by
Ron C. Poirier

illustrated by
Terry Dykstra

EYES ARE THE MOST EXPRESSIVE PART OF ANY FACE, the most mysterious and complex of all the sensory organs. From the "evil eye" of ancient legend to the bowl of peeled grapes at a Halloween party, eyes hold a special mystique, symbolizing both power (the ability to see) and weakness (due to the delicate and irreparable nature of the eye), light (vision) and darkness (blindness), life (open eyes) and death (closed eyes).

The legendary power of the eye has not gone unnoticed in the AD&D® game. Consider the feared gaze attacks of creatures such as basilisks, catoblepas, and bodaks, as well as the charming gazes of vampires and other creatures. Consider, too, the existence of powerful magical items based on the power of the eye. From *eyes of charming* to the popular *robe of eyes* and the fearsome Eye of Vecna, these treasures entice adventurers into lost tombs, dragon's lairs, and even more fearsome places.

Here is a treasure trove of optical magical items for use in the AD&D game.

Cat's Eye

Some thieves believe that the infernal green eyes of the displacer beast hold power because they continue to glow after the beast itself is dead. These thieves believe that the disembodied eye of a displacer beast helps protect them from detection as they go about their lawless ways. This belief probably originated because of the existence of this magical item. Created from the eye of a freshly slain displacer beast, a *cat's eye* is magically preserved so that it never decays or ceases glowing. When concealed in the palm of the hand, the *cat's eye* enables its owner to gain all of the benefits of the 2nd-level wizard spell *misdirection*. In addition, it grants its owner night vision equal to that of a cat.

Dogs of all sorts exhibit a strong dislike of anyone carrying a *cat's eye*, even if they are familiar with the owner. Normal canines do not necessarily attack, but they are much more likely to do so. Blink dogs always attack a character carrying one of these items.

XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

Circlet of the Bat

In truth, this item is related more to the ear than the eye, but it enables its owner to "see" in an unorthodox way. Usually made of silver, a *circlet of the bat* has a miniature carving of an open-mouthed bat on its facing side.

When the *circlet* is worn and a command word is spoken, the mouth of the bat emits high-frequency sound waves

that reflect off of walls and other objects. The *circlet* gives its wearer the magical ability to hear these sounds and process them into something resembling visual images, effectively giving the character a form of sonar. The sonar granted by this item is useful to a distance of 180 feet. Beyond that range, the sound waves become too diffuse to work effectively.

It is important to note that sonar is not just another form of vision. Because it uses sound waves, not light waves, color is impossible to "see" with sonar. Written text is likewise undetectable by sonar alone. Visual-oriented spells such as *invisibility* are ineffective against sonar (thus enabling the user of this item to detect invisible creatures), while a *silence, 15' radius* spell effectively keeps sonar from functioning within its area of effect.

Although the sound waves produced by the *circlet* are outside the range of human hearing, certain creatures (such as bats) might be able to hear them and thus detect a character using this item. Also, at the DM's option, certain creatures such as cloakers and gibbering mouthers might produce sounds that interfere with the proper functioning of this item.

Note that the use of this item in no way impedes the use of speech or ordinary hearing and vision by the wearer.

XP Value: 2,500 **GP Value:** 12,500

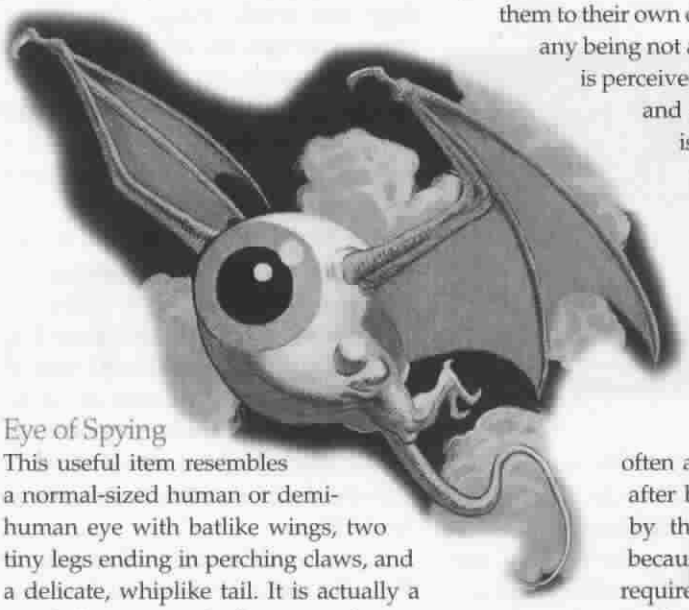
Evil Eye

The first of these fiendish items was created by a covey of greenhags. An *evil eye* is always made from the eye of a monstrous creature, such as a bugbear, ogre, or yuan-ti. It is magically preserved and radiates an aura of Necromancy and Abjuration (but not evil) if examined with the appropriate Divination magic. The *eye* functions only when placed within the empty eye socket of a living being, at which point it grafts itself to the socket and cannot be removed any more easily than a natural eye. The magic of the *evil eye* enables it to expand or contract to fit any eye socket, from gnome to storm giant size.

Although the owner of the eye cannot see through the *evil eye*, the enchanted organ does grant its host the ability to cast a powerful curse on anyone it gazes upon. This curse is handled as a gaze attack, and the recipient must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or suffer its effects. In most respects, the curse is similar to that bestowed by the 3rd-level priest spell, *bestow curse*. However, 50% of these items can only bestow one type of curse (reducing a victim's Constitution score to 3 every time the curse is invoked, for example). Additionally, 25% of these items bestow curses that are permanent unless removed by a *remove curse* spell.

Any person with an *evil eye* attached receives a +3 reaction roll penalty from anyone who sees it.

XP Value: 1,750 **GP Value:** 8,000



Eye of Spying

This useful item resembles a normal-sized human or demihuman eye with batlike wings, two tiny legs ending in perching claws, and a delicate, whiplike tail. It is actually a magical construct similar to a golem or homonculous, but it can be attuned to an owner other than its creator if it is held and a command word is spoken.

The *eye of spying* is animate and dimly self-aware, but it moves only to avoid what it perceives as danger. By holding it and speaking a command word, however, its owner can shift a portion of his or her consciousness into the *eye*, thereby gaining complete control over the movements of the item. In doing so, the owner also gains the ability to see through the *eye*. The owner's body remains in a trance-like state until his or her consciousness leaves the eye. Upon leaving the *eye*, the owner's spirit immediately returns to his or her body regardless of where the *eye* is at the time of departure.

The *eye of spying* is deaf, but it can see as well as any human eye, and most (90%) of these items possess infravision of some type (30–90' range, depending on the type of eye used in their creation). The *eye* can "walk" at a speed of 1 and fly at a speed of 36 (B). Because of its size and maneuverability, it is AC 4 when attacked by blunt weapons and nets, and AC 0 when attacked by anything else. It is delicate, however, and has only 3 hit points.

If the consciousness of its owner is still in the *eye* at the time of its destruction, the owner must make a successful System Shock roll or die. For this reason, many cautious owners abandon their *eyes* at the first hint of trouble, leaving them to their own devices. Note that any being not attuned to the *eye* is perceived by it as a threat, and avoided when it is in control of its own actions.

Eyes of spying often avoid destruction after being abandoned by their owners, and because they do not require food, they can occasionally survive for many years on their own. Even if captured, they are often regarded as curious living creatures, and their new owners might never realize their true potential.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 6,000

Talisman Eye

This magical *talisman* is usually plain, fashioned from wood, glass, or cheap metal. A stylized eye stands proudly emblazoned on the front of the *talisman*.

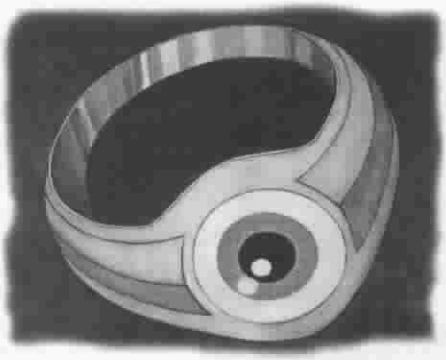
The *eye* has the power to ward off "evil spirits"—noncorporeal beings such as ghosts, wraiths, shadows, and so on. Such creatures that attempt to touch or attack a character protected by this item are unable to do so. In addition, they are unable to possess or exercise mental control over a character who wears this item.

A secondary power of the *talisman eye* is that it renders its bearer completely immune to the curses cast by an *evil eye* and provides a +2 saving throw bonus vs. all other types of curses.

These effects operate continuously, without any need for concentration, as long as the *talisman eye* is displayed. If the protected character attacks or forces contact with an evil spirit, that spirit is no longer affected by the power of the *talisman eye*.

Note that the *talisman eye* protects only against contact, possession, and mental control, not special attacks (a banshee's wail, for instance).

XP Value: 1,500 **GP Value:** 7,500



Eyed Ring

This magical *ring* is usually made of platinum. It has a wide upper band, into which is worked a highly detailed rendition of an eye, complete with iris and pupil. The *ring* is inert until a command word is spoken, at which time the eye animates, enabling its wearer to see through it. This *ring* is useful for looking around corners or into holes. When the *ring* is removed, the eye becomes inert until it is worn and the command word is spoken.

Note that a character who is naturally or magically blinded cannot use this *ring* to see. The magic of the *ring* enables the wearer to see only as well as he or she can currently see. This means that characters with infravision or other visual enhancements can use these abilities when looking through the *eyed ring*.

Fully 10% of these items can broadcast whatever they see to their creator in addition to allowing their wearer to see through them. The creator is mentally alerted when the *eyed ring* is in use and can choose to concentrate on receiving the images it broadcasts or not. The creator of such an item can also choose to activate and deactivate the *ring* at will, in which case it broadcasts only what it sees to its creator, not its wearer. In this case, the wearer might not be aware that the *ring* is functioning. These abilities function only if the creator is on the same plane as the wearer, and they are never revealed by the use of *identify* spells.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Eyes of Fury

These lenses have a slight reddish tint that is not normally detectable when they are worn. When the wearer chooses to activate the power of the lenses, however, his or her eyes glow with a hellish red light. At the same time, the wearer is thrown into a berserk fury and attacks any living enemy within sight.

This fury lasts for 1 full turn, during which time the wearer uses melee or natural weapons only. While under the effects of the fury, the wearer gains a +2 bonus to all attack and damage rolls, as well as a temporary bonus of +5 hit points. Because of the berserk rage, the wearer attacks without regard for life or limb and therefore suffers a –2 penalty to Armor Class.

If no enemies remain within sight or reach and the fury has not run its course, the wearer must still continue attacking, although the wearer can vent his or her rage on inanimate objects rather than friends and innocent bystanders. Anyone who tries to stop the wearer from attacking is perceived as an enemy for the duration of the fury.

The power of these magical *eyes* can be used once per day. If only one *eye* is used, the wearer enters a fury as usual, but gains only a +1 bonus to hit and a –1 penalty to Armor Class.

Fully 10% of these items are cursed and function normally 1d10 times before putting their wearer into a permanent fury. A character in a permanent fury blindly attacks anything that moves, pausing only to eat when hungry and sleep when tired. A successful *remove curse* spell frees such a character from this eternal rage, but the cursed *eyes* never function again.

XP Value: 2,500 **GP Value:** 12,000

Eyes of Glaring

These delicate crystalline lenses always appear in sets of two. When worn over the eyes, they enable their owner to glare menacingly. This effectively gives the wearer an 18 Charisma for purposes of intimidating others. If only one is worn, then it only increases Charisma by two points, up to a maximum of 18, for purposes of intimidation.

If the optional nonweapon proficiency system is used, then the *eyes* grant their owner the Intimidation proficiency in addition to their other benefit.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 5,000

Eyes of Infravision

These lenses are always found in pairs. They are made of a special crystal that can be worn over the eyes of their owner. They grant their wearer the ability to see in the infrared spectrum, as if he or she possessed infravision. About 75% of these sets grant infravision with

a range of 60 feet; of the remaining 25%, half grant infravision to a range of 30 feet, and half grant infravision to a range of 90 feet.

The effects of the lenses are not cumulative with any infravision ability that a character might already have. If only one of these magical lenses is worn, it grants infravision in only one eye.

XP Value: 1,000 **GP Value:** 6,000

Eyes of Soulgazing

These magic lenses are always found in pairs. When in place, they enable their owner to gaze intently at any individual and perceive their aura. This provides information similar to that gained by the casting of a *know alignment* spell. As with a *know alignment* spell, the subject is allowed a saving throw vs. spell to negate this effect.

Even if the subject succeeds in its saving throw, the *eyes of soulgazing* grant their wearer some insight into the target's character. A limited empathy effect informs the wearer of the general emotional state of the subject (happy, sad, angered, and so on). In addition, there is a 10% chance that the gazer gains knowledge of a past intense emotional experience of the subject. The exact nature of this experience is up to the DM, but common examples would include painful losses, moments of terror, or love.

Note that the wearer of these lenses must concentrate on a subject for 2 rounds to see a complete aura. During this time, the subject is likely to notice the wearer's intent gaze.

If only one lens is worn, the wearer can determine the subject's alignment with respect to law and chaos, but not good and evil. No other information can be gained from the use of one lens.

XP Value: 1,250 **GP Value:** 7,500

Hypnotic Eyes

Sometimes called "eyes of the serpent," these items are always found as a pair of crystalline lenses. When placed over the eyes, they enable the wearer to make a gaze attack that can effectively hypnotize one victim. Because the victim's gaze must meet that of the owner of the *eyes* for the trance to take effect, the victim suffers a –2 penalty to the saving throw.

An affected victim falls into a trance and cannot think, move, or act for 2–5 rounds. During this time, any damage inflicted upon the victim breaks the trance immediately.

The user of the *hypnotic eyes* can plant a *suggestion* (as the 3rd-level wizard spell) into the mind of the hypnotized victim. The *suggestion* takes effect after the victim recovers from the trance and remains in effect for up to 6 turns. The victim does not remember having been hypnotized, even after the *suggestion* effects wear off.

It must be noted that the *suggestion* powers of the *hypnotic eyes* are useless if the victim cannot understand the gazer's speech.

If both *hypnotic eyes* are worn, their wearer gains a +1 bonus to Charisma as long as his or her eyes are within view. If only one *hypnotic eye* is used, there is no Charisma bonus, and any victim of the *eye's* gaze attack gains a +3 bonus to the saving throw.

XP Value: 3,000 **GP Value:** 20,000

Ioun Eye

This magical *eye* is actually a type of *ioun stone* and functions as one in all respects save those mentioned here. It resembles a well-crafted crystalline eye, and when it is placed in orbit around a character's head, it enables its owner to see in a 360° radius. The vision granted by the *ioun eye* is continuous, so its owner can see forward, backward, and to the sides at all times, not just when the *eye* is facing these areas.

The power of this item is such that it enables a blind character to see, but it does not have any special visual abilities such as infravision.

XP Value: 300 **GP Value:** 1,500

Lenses of Light Shielding

These magical *lenses* were originally created by the drow, but they are often used by other subterranean races, and some surface-dwellers have found uses for them as well. They resemble other items of their type, but for the fact that they are black as shadow. When placed in the eyes, they do not prevent sight but rather protect the eyes from the harmful effects of exposure to extremely bright light.

While these *lenses* are in operation, all parts of the affected eyes become glossy black. If only one of these *lenses* is used, it protects only one eye from the effects of extremely bright light.

XP Value: 300 **GP Value:** 1,500

Lenses of Second Sight

These magical lenses are usually crafted by fairies or elves. They appear to be clear unless held up to the moonlight, in which case a faint blue-green glimmer can be discerned.

When placed in the eyes, the lenses grant their wearer the power of second sight. This ability effectively gives the wearer the ability to perceive the true forms of fairies and fairy creatures such as sprites, leprechauns, and dryads. Thus, the wearer can see otherwise invisible pixies or recognize a *polymorphed* fairy for what it truly is.

From time to time, these lenses also grant their wearer visions of the future. These visions are sporadic and vague at best, and the wearer has no control over them. Under certain circumstances, the wearer might not realize that what he or she is seeing is a vision and not actually happening at the present time!

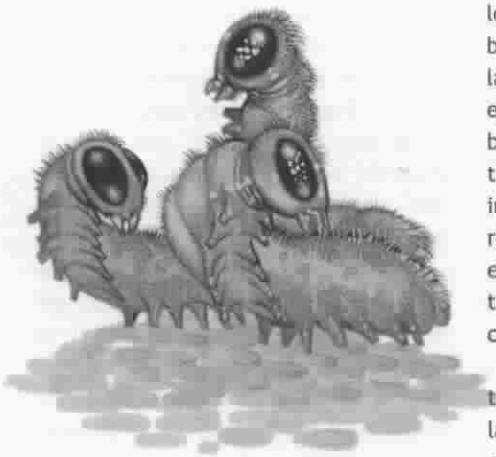
XP Value: 500 **GP Value:** 2,500

Ron can be found playing on Usenet at rec.games.frp.dnd, *where he is a notorious troll named Werebat. He is told that sometime in May, his wife will produce a tiny, wrinkled, gnomelike creature known as a "baby." This pleases him immensely.*

THE ECOLOGY OF THE CARRION CRAWLER

Crawlspaces

The Underdark is the last place you want to make a wrong turn. You never know what you might meet.



by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
L.A. Williams

THE UNDERDARK CAVERN WAS COMPLETELY STILL and silent. Were there any illumination in that lightless cave, only one object of any interest would be seen: the rotting corpse of a hook horror, nine feet of insectoid monstrosity with a vulturelike head and sharp, curved hooks in place of hands.

The creature lay dead, its body covered in what appeared to be moist, juicy pustules, each the size of a small wineskin. Once the pustules began bursting open, however, their true nature became apparent, as wriggling larvae crawled forth.[1]

Each larva looked like a large caterpillar, with a soft, pliant body about a foot long, an inchworm's knobby pseudolegs bunched together at the front and rear, a large head equipped with oversized black eyes and a complex mouth.[2] The grubs' bodies were still wet with the muck of their eggs when they began burrowing into the corpse of the decaying hook horror, devouring its flesh. Wet sounds emerged from the once-silent cavern as the grubs chewed their way deep into the corrupted flesh.

The hook horror was a massive creature, but there were scores of the hungry larvae, each focused on the single, all-consuming task of sating their ravenous hunger. They devoured the beast in less than a week.

Then they began devouring each other.[3]

"Ta-dah!" announced Shandrilla with a flourish, popping open the lock on the massive iron chest her gnomish companions had uncovered. The two gnomes crowded closer, eager to see what riches lay within.

Javorik the Bold, Illusionist Extraordinaire, personally hoped for a stockpile of magical items, maybe even a replacement for the wand of lightning he had recently lost to the strange pudding they had fought in these very corridors a few weeks ago. His cousin Federico had simpler tastes: gold and gems, the more the merrier.

"Well?" Federico demanded. "Open it, you silly human girl!"

Shandrilla gave the warrior a quick scowl in the torchlight, then turned her attention back to the chest. "I'll take the lock," she said, dropping the device into her thieving kit. The lock had been a real challenge to pick, and she wanted more time to study it in better light.

"Sure, sure, fine, fine," Federico agreed. "What'd we get?"

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1. Female carrion crawlers lay their leathery eggs (about one hundred in a clutch) among carrion, providing their offspring with a ready source of food when they hatch. That is the extent of the parental care the female provides for her young, for the eggs are abandoned immediately after being laid and are even occasionally devoured by the mother or any other adult carrion crawler that discovers them.

2. Newborn carrion crawler larvae bite for a single point of damage, have ½ Hit Die, and strike with a THAC0 of 20. Their soft bodies have an Armor Class of 9.

3. When the larvae chew their way out of their eggs (about a week after being laid), the newborn grubs immediately devour the adjacent carrion and often each other, falling into a feeding frenzy to rival those of sharks. Those grubs that avoid being eaten by their siblings are often devoured by an adult, for carrion crawlers enjoy the taste of their own young. As a result, few survive to adulthood.

The hook horror was a massive creature, but ... they devoured the beast in less than a week.

Shandrilla creaked open the lid of the weathered chest, then gasped in surprise. "Gentlemen," she said in an awed voice, "We. Are. RICH!" She scooped her hands deep into the pile of gold coins that nearly filled the chest, throwing them into the air in her exuberance.

Their hoots and hurrahs echoed eerily down the twisted corridors of the underground tunnel network.

The grub wriggled and squirmed out of its old skin. It emerged a larger version of its previous self, as it had after each of its previous molts. This was the creature's tenth molt in as many months; now its flexible body was nearly six feet long when fully extended.[4]

The grub had been one of the few of its brood to survive this long. Once the hook horror in their hatchery had been stripped to a mere exoskeleton, only the toughest and fiercest of the grubs had endured the cannibalistic frenzy that followed.

In the past several months, the grub had experienced a wide variety of new tastes: discarded spider husks, rotting lizard meat, the rank, decaying flesh of a small, horned humanoid creature. It had even once chased down a fire beetle, nudging it onto its back and biting through its underside to reach the juicy flesh within.[5]

But those meals were long gone and of no use to the creature now; as always, the process of molting had made the grub ravenously hungry. It wriggled and inched its way down the Underdark corridor, seeking food—any food, living or dead.

"Well, that's it," said Javorik, dropping the last of the golden coins into Little Biggie, the bag of holding he had spread out on the cavern floor at his feet and into which the three had been chucking the contents of the treasure chest. Even though the chest had been far too big for the gnomes to carry, its contents fit easily into the small sack, thanks to its extradimensional magical properties. "We'll count it all and split it up when we get back, but I'd say there's easily several hundred, maybe even close to a thousand, each!"

"Beer money for a couple months, anyway!" chuckled Federico, rubbing his little hands together in glee.

"What about you, Shanny?" asked Javorik. "Got any plans for your share? Gonna look for a magical weapon or two? Some better armor? Or maybe spend it all on frilly dresses and gaudy jewelry? Gonna forget the life of an adventurer and find some good-looking man to settle down with?"

"Never you mind, gnome," answered the young thief, blushing, who honestly hadn't given it any thought. "Let's just get back up to the surface, and then we'll worry about spending it." Shandrilla glanced around at her surroundings in the flickering torchlight; why did she always seem to spend so much of her time traipsing around in rough-hewn tunnels deep under the earth? Gods knew she didn't enjoy being so far below the surface, where one simple earthquake could send tons of rock crashing down on her head. And the monsters! If she came across one more weird pudding, she'd scream ...

"I'm with her," agreed Federico. "The quicker we get back, the sooner I can quench this thirst of mine!"

"Oh, all right," said Javorik. "Let's go." He took a left and headed down the passageway. His cousin, though, had turned right and was heading the other way.

4. Carrion crawlers molt in the manner of many insects and reptiles, shedding the outer layer of skin as their bodies grow. Grubs begin life about 1 foot long and molt every month or so, adding approximately 6 inches with each molting. Each shedding of skin takes about a day.

When a carrion crawler grub reaches a length of about 6 feet, it metamorphosizes into its adult form. This process takes 5–7 days, after which it rips out of its old grub skin and emerges as a small adult. The adult form looks rather like a cross between a giant green cutworm and a cephalopod, for the creature sports the eight flailing tentacles arranged in a horseshoe shape over its sharp mandibles that make the carrion crawler so distinctive. Instead of the soft, caterpillarlike pseudolegs of the grub form, the adult has twelve sets of insectlike legs, six pairs toward the front of its body and six pairs at the rear.

The adult carrion crawler continues to grow, molting each month (and adding another 12 inches with each molt) until reaching its full size of 9 feet long. Carrion crawlers have a 2-year lifespan, about half of which is spent as a full-sized adult.

5. As its name implies, a carrion crawler prefers a diet of dead, decaying flesh, but if carrion is unavailable the creature has no qualms against attacking living beings. As a result of their diet, carrion crawlers (and grubs) exude a constant stench of decay; this odor often gives others warning of the creature's approach. The DM should allow a +2 modifier to the

"Hey, just wait a minute, guys!" said Shandrilla. "Where are you going?"

"To the surface!" the gnomes said in unison, pointing in opposite directions.

"Oh great," said the young thief.

With a savage twist, the carrion crawler shook off the remains of its latest molting, letting the torn skin fall to the floor, and emerged for the first time in its adult stage.

While it still retained the basic form of its larval stage, there were several notable differences. The most noticeable were the eight tentacles sprouting from the front of the creature's head. These glistened with moisture and waved slowly back and forth as if responding to a secret breeze.[6] The head itself had grown a chitinous layer of armor, making it harder and tougher than the rest of the creature's flexible body.[7]

As with all of its moltings, the creature emerged ravenously hungry—this time more so than normal, for the metamorphosis from larva to adult had taken much longer than its larval moltings. Skittering along the rock floor of the tunnel network on two dozen newly developed legs, the carrion crawler eagerly searched for its next meal.

"I can't believe we're lost!" bemoaned Shandrilla. "You guys have been down here—what?— at least twice before!"

"Ah, but Shanny, you remember what a hassle it was finding our way down here in the first place! All of these tunnels start to look the same after awhile. Anyway, I'm certain the surface is this way."

"This way," corrected Federico, pointing in the opposite direction.

"No, it's this way," insisted Javorik. "Remember, there was that T-intersection where we took a right."

"That led to a dead end!" responded Federico.

"No, not that one! The one before then. First there was that squiggly bit, then the three lefts, then the right and the bit that sloped downhill ..."

"Wait a minute. Three lefts is a right," pointed out Shandrilla.

"Only if they're all right angles," responded the illusionist, his prodigious nose in the air. "Remember, that last one just kind of veered off funny."

"Then that's a 'Y,' not a 'T,'" argued Federico.

"So?"

"So, you said 'the T-intersection,' not 'the Y-intersection.'"

"I wasn't talking about that one then! First there was the T-intersection, then the squiggly bit—"

"Wait a minute, I thought the squiggly bit came before the T-intersection."

Shandrilla sighed. "Javorik, just how certain are you that you know the way back to the surface?"

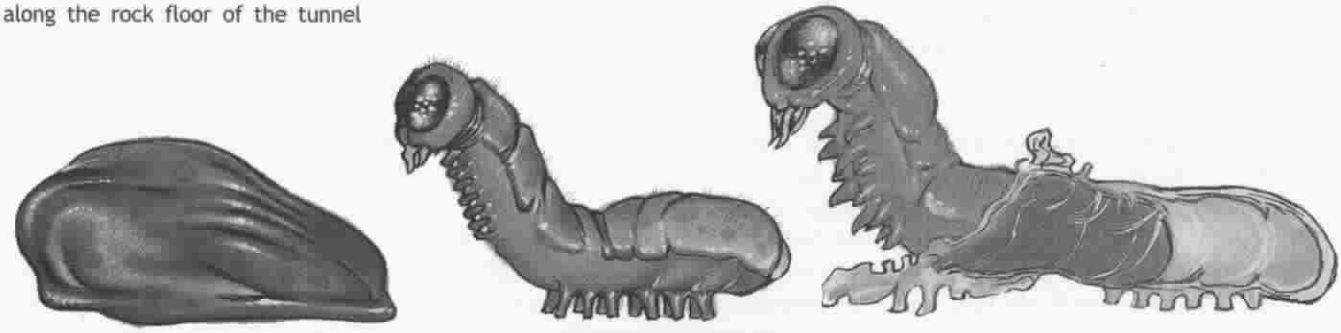
"Absolutely certain."

"How certain?"

"Okay, fairly certain."

Shandrilla crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow questioningly at her illusionist companion.

"Oh, all right then, just a slight little teensy tiny bit less than fairly certain."



Larvae

Grubs begin life about 1 foot long

Each molting takes about a day.

a group's roll to see if they are surprised when encountering a carrion crawler.

6. Carrion crawlers habitually wave their tentacles even when not attacking, for the tentacles are important sensory appendages, housing the creature's senses of touch, taste, and smell. In this aspect, they serve the same role as an insect's antennae.

Carrion crawlers also have keen senses of sight and hearing. They have two large, shiny multifaceted eyes well-equipped to pick up movement. The eyes also grant the creatures infravision to a range of 30 feet. Tiny hairs on their legs and body sense sound vibrations, providing the creature an acute sense of hearing.

7. The carrion crawler's hard, chitinous head plate grants that portion of its body a natural Armor Class of 3. The rest of its body is soft and fleshy like a caterpillar's, providing only AC 7.

8. Like many arthropods, carrion crawlers can walk along walls and ceilings at their full movement rate. They can also walk backward at full speed, a useful ability when they have crawled into a narrow dead-end tunnel.

9. A carrion crawler's primary attacks are with its eight tentacles, each of which is covered in a sticky secretion that causes paralysis in those touched by even one of the appendages. A carrion crawler always goes after a single opponent at a time, never splitting its attacks between two or more foes. This means that the poor victim might have to roll up to eight successful saving throws vs. paralyzation each round to prevent being immobilized for 2–12 turns! As might be expected, carrion crawlers are immune to the effects of their own tentacles and those of others of their race.

Being basically mindless, a carrion crawler attacks its enemies one at a time until they have all been paralyzed or fled the scene. The creature never checks morale, fighting to the death. Once no longer confronted by mobile enemies, the carrion crawler chooses a victim and begins eating, inflicting 1–2 points of damage per round with its sharp mandibles. A carrion crawler does not bite in combat; it paralyzes its prey first so that it can devour its helpless victim without interruption.

10. These holes are called spiracles, and they are the means by which the carrion crawler breathes. There are eighteen in all, nine on a side.

11. Carrion crawlers defy standard taxonomic classification. They are not insects, despite their many similarities to insects while in the larval stage. The closest approximation in the taxonomic system used by most human cultures would be phylum arthropoda, class myriapoda, putting the carrion crawler in the same general category as centipedes and millipedes.

There are differences, of course, primarily the carrion crawler's lack of antennae (present in all earthly myriapods) and the presence of the eight paralytic tentacles. Also, most myriapods have their multiple leg pairs spaced more or less evenly along their body lengths, while the carrion crawler's legs are bunched up in sets of twelve at the front and rear thirds of the creature's body.

The reason the carrion crawler differs so much from terrestrial creatures is that it is not native to the planet. It is instead believed to be a native to the home world of the illithids, or mind flayers, wherever that may be. Carrion crawlers not only share the same habitat as the illithids but also bear a ring of tentacles around the mouth much like the mind flayers (although mind flayers have only four tentacles).

tures who stood with weapons in hand.

It didn't hesitate but rushed toward the nearest foe, tentacles waving and mouthparts open wide in anticipation ...

"Hmm, that's funny," said Federico, staring at the solid wall of the dead end tunnel before them and scratching his chin in puzzlement.

"You'll notice I'm not laughing," said Shandrilla with a scowl.

The dwarf raised his shield up to the crawler as the thing attacked, its paralyzing tentacles flailing wildly, eager to embrace its intended prey. The dwarf brushed the tentacles aside with his shield and swung his warhammer in a vicious arc at the worm-creature's head. The weapon bounced off the carrion crawler's chitinous head plates.

At the same time, the other dwarf was methodically swinging his battle-ax right below the row of regularly spaced holes along the monster's side, spilling yellow blood from its soft body with each strike.[10] The carrion crawler rose up on its hind legs and swung its flexible body around to strike at the ax-wielding dwarf. That one, chanting obliviously with each swing of his weapon like a smith singing at the forge, didn't even see the attack coming. One minute he was carving chunks of fatty flesh from the worm-monster's side; the next, he was engulfed in a writhing mass of tentacles that had dropped over his head. Suddenly unable to move, his chanting stopped, as did his weapon blows. He fell over as soon as the creature released him, unable even to balance upright.

The other dwarf soon found himself facing a hungry and pain-crazed carrion crawler all alone. "Come on then, you stupid bug,"[11] he said between gritted teeth, hefting his weapon. The words were meaningless to the worm-monster, but the crawler was more than eager to comply ...

"Maybe we should try those stairs we passed," suggested Javorik.

"Those stairs went down," Shandrilla said. "We want up, not down."

"Picky, picky."

"Shh— What was that?" Federico asked suddenly, hand raised in the air to stop his companions.

"What was what?" asked Javorik.

"Quiet!" hissed his cousin. The three adventurers stood silent and still, straining their ears. All Shandrilla could hear at first was the sputtering and hissing of the torch in her hand, but gradually she made out the sounds of metal striking stone, and the echoes of shouted curses. There was no doubt about it, the sounds were coming from the stairway leading farther down into the Underdark.

"This way!" shouted Federico, drawing his short sword and leaping down the stairs three at a time, no small feat for a gnome in plate mail. "They might need our help!"

"This way!" shouted Federico, drawing his short sword and leaping down the stairs three at a time.

"Oh, great," sighed Shandrilla.

This final prey was proving to be more difficult than the carrion crawler had anticipated. Although it was severely wounded and there were already two potential meals lying helplessly on the stone floor, the thought of snatching one up and fleeing back to its lair never occurred to the creature.[12] There was still an enemy to overcome and overcome him it would, or die trying.

This one was armored like a beetle, but it was quick like a lizard. The other two like it had been dispatched quickly, but surprise had been on the carrion crawler's side then; now it faced its enemy without such an advantage. The prey seemed to realize the danger posed by the monster's tentacles, for it hid behind its removable shell each time the creature attacked. The prey kept trying to flee from the monster's head and attack its unprotected flank, but the carrion crawler was too efficient a fighter to allow that to happen, and the cramped quarters of the narrow tunnel worked against the prey.

And then more prey arrived on the scene.

The first of the new prey seemed an even shorter version of one of these beetle-lizards, but the other two who followed farther behind lacked the shells and would be that much easier to chew ...

Shandrilla raced down the steps behind Federico, marveling at the speed of the gnomish warrior. Then her foot slipped out from under her, and she bounced down the last of the steps to land in an undignified heap.

"Shanny! You okay?" called Javorik, bounding up behind her as fast as his little legs would take him.

Most worlds inhabited by illithids also house carrion crawlers; it is believed the mind flayers actively raise them as they do amorphs, fungi, and other dangerous creatures. Further details on the relationship between carrion crawlers and illithids can be found in Stephen Inniss' "The Sunset World" in *DRAGON® Magazine* #150.

12. Carrion crawlers keep permanent underground lairs, venturing out every few days to search for food. When they discover a meal, they usually drag it back to the lair so they can devour it in relative safety. The two main exceptions to this policy are when the meal is too big to drag away (as when stumbling upon the corpse of a purple worm) or when the flesh is so rotten that it falls apart when moved. In the latter case, the carrion crawler devours its meal in place; in the former, it usually attempts to bite off a large chunk of flesh and drag that portion back to its lair for consumption.

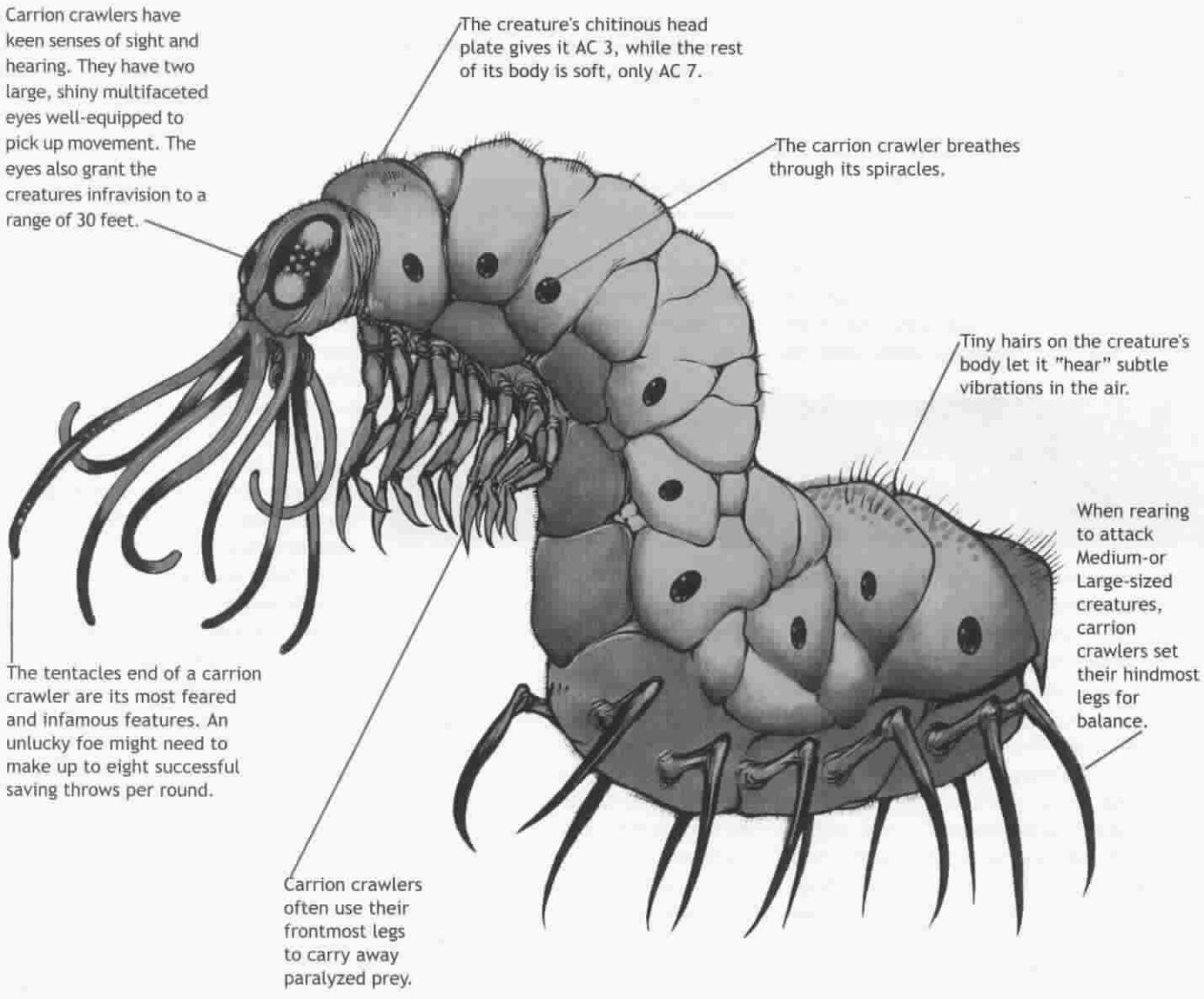
Since carrion crawlers customarily drag their prey back to their lairs, a crawler den is apt to include all sorts of incidental treasures, as typified by Treasure Type B. Coins, gems, and metallic objects are likely to be found intact (if scattered about), but most organic items (including those made of cloth or leather) are often partially eaten or rotting away.

13. Unbeknownst to Shandrilla, she's encountered the by-product of the carrion crawler method of reproduction. During the mating season, males deposit sticky blobs of spermatophores (usually around 20) along the surfaces they travel. Each blob is a small oval about as big around as a fist. If and when a female carrion crawler comes across such a blob, she picks it up in her tentacles and stores it in a special set of buccal pouches inside her mouth.

The process of storing spermatophores triggers egg production in the female. For the next several days, her body starts generating around 100 eggs, which are temporarily stored in her bloated abdomen. During this time, she hunts for an appropriate corpse of sufficient size to lay her eggs. When one has been found, she ejects the eggs through the genital orifice between the third and fourth pairs of her front legs, grasping each egg with her tentacles and placing it into position upon the carrion. The eggs are then fertilized by the sperm cells she's been storing inside her buccal cavities. The entire egg-laying process takes the better part of a day.

The female dies a few weeks after laying her clutch of eggs, exhausted from the effort. Immediately after laying her eggs and for the remainder of the short span of time left to her, her Movement rate drops to 3, and she suffers a –2 attack penalty.

The Anatomy of the Carrion Crawler


Carrion crawlers have keen senses of sight and hearing. They have two large, shiny multifaceted eyes well-equipped to pick up movement. The eyes also grant the creatures infravision to a range of 30 feet.
The creature's chitinous head plate gives it AC 3, while the rest of its body is soft, only AC 7.
The carrion crawler breathes through its spiracles.
Tiny hairs on the creature's body let it "hear" subtle vibrations in the air.
When rearing to attack Medium-or Large-sized creatures, carrion crawlers set their hindmost legs for balance.
The tentacles end of a carrion crawler are its most feared and infamous features. An unlucky foe might need to make up to eight successful saving throws per round.
Carrion crawlers often use their frontmost legs to carry away paralyzed prey.

He held his thumb and index finger a hair's-breadth apart to demonstrate.

"Lead on, Federico," said Shandrilla.

The carrion crawler clung motionless to the ceiling, listening intently.[8] It had heard voices just a moment before—but where?

There, behind it! It did a quick U-turn on the ceiling and started racing toward the sound, its multiple pairs of legs rippling in wavelike unison with an almost hypnotic rhythm.

As the beast turned a corner, it received its first glimpse of its new prey: three small humanoid creatures staggering through the Underdark corridor under the bulky weight of their backpacks.

The trio carried metal lanterns and a wide assortment of weapons. Had the ravenous monster the intelligence to understand their language, it would have heard them exchanging opinions on the first bar they should hit when they got back to the surface, and which of the three would be able to drink the others under the table.

The carrion crawler therefore took them completely by surprise.

The creature dropped silently from the ceiling as they passed underneath, catching the rearmost creature with its tentacles before the others were even aware of the crawler's presence. That one froze like a statue in mid-stride and toppled over onto his face, breaking his nose in the process.[9] The carrion crawler scrabbled over his still form in a beeline for the others.

The sound of the fallen creature's armor clattering on the stone floor gave the other two enough warning to evade the tentacled monster. Spinning around, they saw the monster barreling toward them and dove in opposite directions; the creature's tentacles swished through the air just above one's head. Then the crawler faced the remaining two crea-

"Fine, fine," replied the young thief between clenched teeth, rubbing a bruised knee and trying not to curse aloud. "Slipped in something.[13] Go on, I'm fine."

Javorik sped on down the corridor in his cousin's wake, Shandrilla limping behind him.

When she caught up to the others, she gasped out loud at the sight before her. Shandrilla was a city girl, more accustomed to scaling high walls and sliding through the shadows of back alleys than slinking around in the bowels of the earth and fighting hideous monstrosities. The sight that greeted her made her blood run cold.

There in the corridor ahead was the biggest worm she'd ever seen. On closer inspection, she realized that it wasn't a true worm, for the creature reared up on its many hind legs and lunged at the dwarf immediately before it.[14] Thick, yellow blood spilled freely down its side, but the abomination hardly seemed to notice. The dwarf raised its shield to ward off the creature, but the nightmarish monster grasped the edges of the shield with six or eight of its front claws and hoisted the dwarven warrior into the air. A cluster of vile-looking tentacles snaked out and slapped the dwarf in the face; the stout warrior fell silent. Then, as if no longer interested in its current victim, the worm-monster released him to plummet hard against the stone floor. The creature dropped its front half back down to the ground and set its sight on Federico, tentacles whipping back and forth.

Federico had raced into the corridor filled with bravado and battle-lust, but if Shandrilla was reading his body language correctly, he'd had an almost immediate change of heart. Fortunately, before he had the time to turn tail and flee, a barrage of magic missiles raced past his head and found their mark. The worm's front half crashed to the ground. Its middle section arched up as the legs of the back half ran a couple extra steps before the creature toppled over in a tangled pile. By the time Shandrilla had hobbled up to the gnomes, the fell creature was lying on the floor, hideous, insectoid legs twitching spasmodically.

"Is he dead?" whispered the young thief, the blood drained from her face.

"I don't know," said Javorik. He went over to inspect the fallen dwarf. "He's breathing!" he called out.

"There's more behind the monster!" pointed out Shandrilla. She was slinking along the wall of the tunnel, trying to slip past the dead worm-monster without brushing up against it.

She found a second dwarf lying on his back just past the creature, an axe gripped tightly in both hands as if in mid-swing. Bending over his body, she saw that he was breathing and that his eyes were wide open, but he stared sightlessly ahead at nothing and his hands were rigidly clenching his weapon as if his life depended upon keeping a firm grip. "Paralyzed," decided Shandrilla out loud.

There was a groan from farther down the corridor. Shandrilla saw another dwarf stumble to his feet, then look up at her. "Hey! Get away from him!" he cried.

Javorik and Federico heard the commotion and came running over. "Lousy thief!" snarled the dwarf, drawing a sword from his belt. "Trying to loot me friend, eh?"

"I was doing no such thing!" replied Shandrilla, indignant at the accusation. She stood at her full height and crossed her arms over her chest. "And I'm not a thief! I'm a recovery specialist."

Federico scowled up at the dwarf, hand on the hilt of his sword. He might have flinched at combat with an enormous killer worm, but he wasn't about to let some stupid dwarf push him or his friends around. "Look here, buddy, we just saved your miserable lives," he snarled. "I'd think you might be a bit grateful, rather than spitting out accusations."

> The monster crashed into the warriors with a silence that seemed much creepier than if it had bellowed its defiance.

"I seen what I seen."

"Look," said Javorik, "Couldn't we settle this elsewhere? I don't know about you, but I for one feel kind of exposed out here. There's a chamber just down this corridor; maybe we could drag your pals in there until they come out of it? I don't really want to be standing out here in the open if another one of these big caterpillar-things shows up."[15]

"Hrrmph!" snorted the dwarf. "Ye lead the way, then, an' I'll do the draggin'. I don't want her near our loot."

Shandrilla turned to the ungrateful dwarf with a hot retort on her tongue, but screamed aloud instead. Another of the worm-monsters was barreling down the tunnel toward them.

"Shanny, get these two to safety!" ordered Javorik, readying another spell. "We'll hold off the critter!"

Shandrilla bent over the ax-wielding dwarf and started lugging him slowly down the corridor, toward the dead beast still oozing yellowish blood onto the tunnel floor. Gods, but the dwarf weighed a ton! Why did she always seem to end up dragging unconscious or

14. A carrion crawler often rears up on its hindmost twelve legs when attacking Medium-sized or larger creatures. This puts its body at about the same height as a human, making successful attacks more likely. Once its prey has been slain, it often carries the corpse slung under its upper body, holding it tightly with its twelve front legs, while walking back to its lair on its hind legs. Otherwise, the carrion crawler walks on all twenty-four legs, keeping its flexible body relatively flat. (It stands about 4 feet high when doing so.)

15. Although normally solitary creatures, several carrion crawlers can be found in the same area and even sharing the same lair, so long as food remains plentiful. No more than six of the monsters have ever been encountered together, and even this is highly unusual.

Even when encountered in numbers, carrion crawlers do not cooperate; each attacks its own opponents and moves on until all potential prey has been paralyzed or fled. In the event of a single victim and two or more carrion crawlers, the crawlers immediately attack each other as soon as the prey has been immobilized, often fighting to the death. Since carrion crawlers cannot paralyze each other and their mandibles inflict only 1–2 points of damage, a battle between two carrion crawlers can take

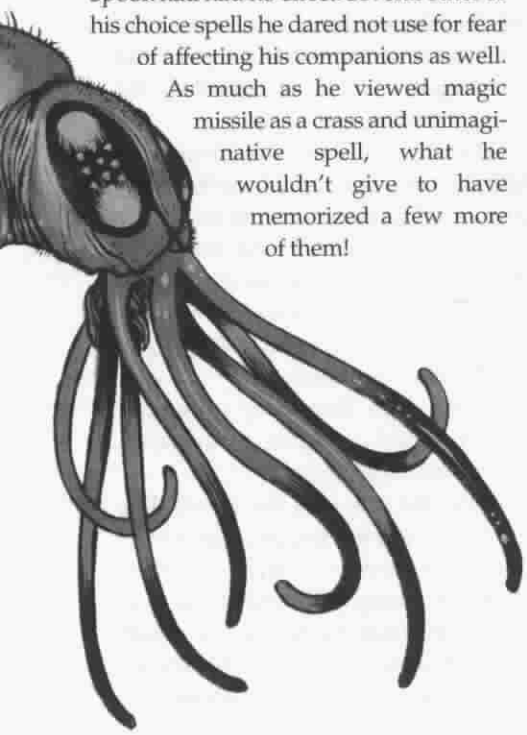
paralyzed armor-clad adventurers down Underdark passageways? Last time it was Federico, and he weighed even more than Shandrilla had imagined.

Javorik was out of magic missiles; instead, he threw up an illusionary wall in front of the rampaging beast. It might have slowed it down momentarily, but it was hard to tell. The monster popped right through the phony wall and continued its charge.[16]

Federico and the dwarf stepped up, swords drawn, ready to engage the beast. "You go right; I'll take left," said the gnome. "And watch those tentacles."

The monster crashed into the warriors with a silence that seemed much creepier than if it had bellowed its defiance.[17] They ducked and parted ways, swords poking up at the beast as it struck. The dwarf was hit on the back by a tentacle, but it struck only armor and had no effect.

Javorik, meanwhile, was struggling to find another useful spell in his inventory. Spook had had no effect. Several other of his choice spells he dared not use for fear of affecting his companions as well. As much as he viewed magic missile as a crass and unimaginative spell, what he wouldn't give to have memorized a few more of them!



Federico managed to stab into the worm-monster's side between two of its legs. He was rewarded with a spurt of thick yellow blood and the creature's undivided attention. Twisting its malleable body to face the little gnome, it slammed all eight grasping tentacles in his direction. Federico didn't have a chance fighting off eight attacks at once, especially when each tentacle was nearly as long as he was tall. He went rigid and was out of the fight.

"Oh, what the hell," muttered Javorik, casting a mirror image upon himself. Soon after, seven identical Javoriks went screaming down the corridor, daggers in hand.

Shandrilla watched all of this with mounting horror. With Federico down, they had lost half of their combat power.

She didn't think Javorik would last long armed with only a dagger and a handful of fake duplicates. That left only the dwarf, and if he couldn't handle it, herself. It was a shame these other two dwarven warriors were still paralyzed; they could use all the help they could get.

And then, looking down at the dwarves at her feet, she got an idea.

Javorik and the dwarf had been stabbing at the creature, opening several wounds in its flanks. As was common with the mirror image spell, it was hard to keep track of which Javorik was which, for they shifted around so much it soon became impossible to track any one image's movements. This apparently held true for the creature as well, for it attacked three false images in a row, popping them like soap bubbles with its tentacles.

In the heat of battle, fighting for his life against a smelly, tentacled beast from the bowels of the earth, and with a crazy illusionist going stab-crazy all around him (he half expected to get stabbed himself amid the frenzy), the dwarf caught sight of the little human thief down the corridor alone with his friends' helpless bodies, down by the slain monster. Confound it if she wasn't looting them of their hard-fought treasures. Blasted thieves! You couldn't turn your backs on them for an instant.

Of course, when fighting for your life against a carrion crawler, it's generally not a good idea to turn your back on it, either. The creature swung its body onto the distracted dwarf and wrapped its tentacles around his face. He fell to the ground with a litany of dwarven curses unspoken on his tongue.

But by then Shandrilla was ready. Wearing not one but two dwarven backpacks, each crammed near to bursting with loot, she hobbled awkwardly down the corridor, shouting at the top of her lungs.

"COME AND GET ME, UGLY!"

Even Javorik was shocked. He and his remaining two mirror images froze up and looked questioningly at each other. The silly human girl wasn't even holding her weapon! What was she thinking?

That didn't seem to bother the worm-monster, however; it struck out at her with tentacles spread wide to cover the greatest area. Stifling a scream, Shandrilla leapt into the tentacles' embrace.

She figured she had only a few seconds before the paralyzation kicked in, and put those few final moments of movement to good use. As a tingling sensation swept down her arms and throughout her body, Shandrilla wound her arms around as many tentacles as she could, gripping down hard on them with her hands and even biting down on one that happened to be right in front of her face. This had better work, she thought as all conscious movement was taken from her.

It did. Javorik and his two mirror images looked on as the creature's head was tugged to the floor of the tunnel under the weight of one slim girl and two overloaded packs. The mon-

quite some time. (If the intended prey is lucky, the effects of the paralyzation might wear off, allowing a chance to make a break for it while the two would-be devourers hash it out!)

16. The carrion crawler relies predominantly upon its senses of sight and smell. For an illusion to be effective against such a creature, it should have both visual and olfactory components.

17. Carrion crawlers make no vocalizations; usually the only sound they make is the scratching of their many claws on stone.

18. Severed tentacles can be sold to an alchemist, for when properly boiled, the essence thus distilled can be fashioned into a potion protecting the imbiber from all forms of paralysis (including that of ghouls, ghasts, and various other undead creatures) for 1d10+2 turns. Optionally, an alchemist can craft a potion that paralyzes the drinker for 2d6 turns. (This is often the unintended result of a poorly made batch of the potion mentioned above.) Finally, carrion crawler tentacle essence can be used to fashion a gummy ointment that, if spread lavishly over a pair of gloves, allows the wearer to paralyze other living beings for 1d8 turns by touch. The ointment generally wears off after 2–5 uses or 1d4+2 hours, whichever comes first. Of course, those foolish enough to try applying the ointment directly on their own hands usually end up paralyzing themselves.

Details on the uses of carrion crawler essence can be found on page 91 of the RAVENLOFT® campaign supplement *Lords of Darkness*.

ster worm thrashed around but was unable to extricate its tentacles. "Like spearing fish in a barrel," commented the illusionist to his nearest duplicate, as they simultaneously carved their way into the creature's body with their slim daggers.

Movement returned slowly to Shandrilla; as the last one paralyzed by the creature, she was also the last one to regain full movement. She sat up weakly and trembled.

"You okay, Shanny?" asked Javorik, obviously concerned for his human friend. He was covered nearly head to toe in sticky yellow blood. "We had to cut off a couple of that thing's tentacles to get you out from it."[18]

Now that Shandrilla was able to move again, she found herself shivering uncontrollably with the worst case of the heebie-jeebies she'd even known in her life. "I can't believe I really did that!" she said, scraping worm-slime from her tongue.

Three dwarves approached her, shame on their faces. "Uh, yeah. Us either," said one.

"Bravest thing I ever seen," commented another.

"Look, about what I said earlier ..." began the third, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Forget about it," said Shandrilla with a wave of her hand. "I'll consider us even if you guys can get us out of here and back up to the surface."

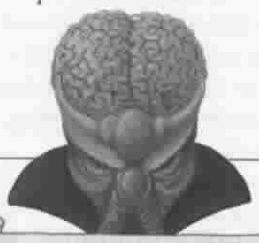
"No problem!" said the first dwarf. "Right up these stairs, down to the left, a quick T-intersection to the right, a squiggly bit, up a slope–"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the second dwarf. "I thought it was a Y-intersection."

"Didn't the squiggly bit come before the intersection?" asked the third.

"Oh, great," said Shandrilla.

Whenever Johnathan M. Richards researches an "Ecology" article, he is astounded by the vast complexity of the animal world. In this case, carrion crawler reproduction was taken directly from the Scutigerella, a species of earthly myriapod. Once again, Johnathan's copy of The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom *comes through!*



MIND FLAYERS

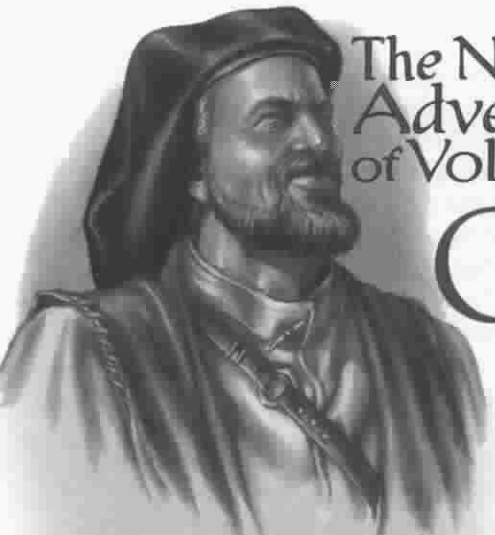
by Mike Selinker

no. 8

The evil wizard has given you a list of his magic items—with a twist. All the items are "(something) of (something)" The FIRST WORD clue defines the type of items PLUS one letter at the front (so HAT might be clued as if it were CHAT). The LAST WORD clue defines the last word of the item with one letter changed (so HEALING might be clued as HEATING).

	FIRST WORD		LAST WORD		MAGIC ITEM
1	Bone contents	OF	Fixing, as a cat	=	
2	Manhandle lecherously	OF	The process of building	=	
3	Poke	OF	It gets the kinks out	=	
4	Rose's point	OF	Crowing about oneself	=	
5	Not flat or natural	OF	Toss out	=	
6	Carry	OF	Type of theater booth	=	
7	Government inquiry	OF	Female sheep	=	
8	Fencing sword	OF	Degrading	=	
9	"Dallas" oil family	OF	Hamburger cook's task	=	
10	Harsh-sounding	OF	Young deer	=	

By Ed Greenwood
Illustrated by Ron Spencer



The New Adventures of Volo
Onward!

Volothamp Geddarm at your service, gentles, sett ing truths of the Realms before you like pearls presented on black velvet to an overpainted Waterdhavian matron. Oh, please be assured that I draw no parallels between those cat snarling, false-fronted matrons and you, gentle reader. Not at all! Volo is a man of tact[1], judgment[2], and discernment[3]—one who'd never stoop to such foolish tactics. But enough apology—this day I must trumpet my new career.

Once again I'm free to wander the Realms, reporting all I see to the waiting world![4] I'm even under the magical protection of one of the mightiest mages in all Faerûn, that infamous pipesmoking prankster of Shadowdale—Elminster![5] So by my pen expect to see secrets of the Realms revealed! A personage here, an enchantment there—places, folk, treasures, and more: the full, vivid panoply of the Realms, set before you like a feast that offers too many dishes to enjoy![6]

What All Know and the Eye Beholds

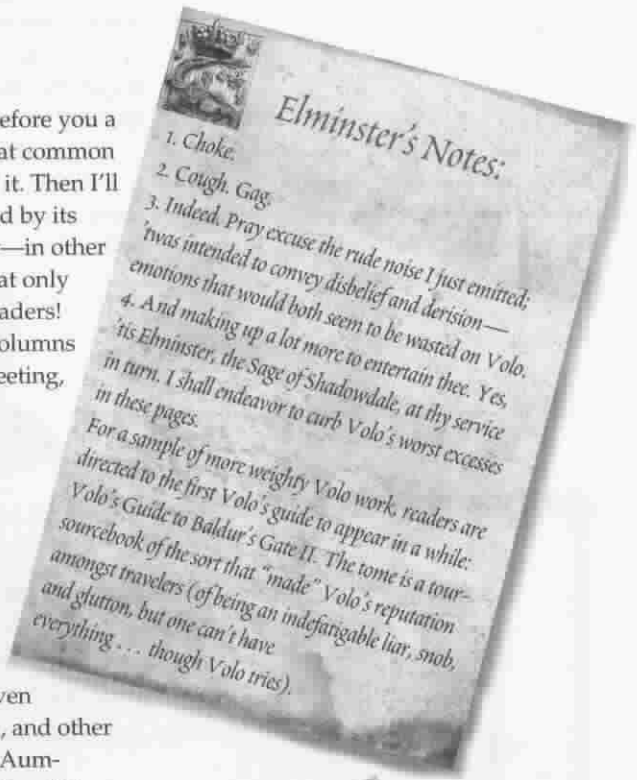
Under this heading, I'll set before you a topic or some news, and what common knowledge or rumor says of it. Then I'll deal with its history, followed by its true status and details today—in other words, the dirt and detail that only Volo brings to you, gentle readers!

Let that be the pattern in columns to come—but for this first meeting, hearken to the latest exciting Realmslore I've unearthed: secrets of the elves![7]

Aumrauth

Found beneath the waves of the Shining Sea between Tharsult and the mouth of the River Scelptar, this is a verdant, crowded aquatic elven realm of many fish, seaweed, and other "farmed" undersea life. The Aumrauthen trade with select surface fisherfolk, meeting in sheltered bays on moonlit nights to exchange goods; many so-called "deep-caught fish" are actually handed to fishermen at the surface in "seawater sleeves" made of seaweed woven through the ribcages of dead whales.

Aumrauthen warriors carry standards that display long, deep green pennants, each charged with a single large, white, spired shell. Aumrauth is ruled jointly by an Exalted Lord and a Lady Queen, who are not married and need not consort with each other, although the current holders of these for-life offices, Lord Eilauver Ildroun and Lady Helartha Jaglene, are firm friends.



Elminster's Notes:

1. Choke.

2. Cough. Gag.

3. Indeed. Pray excuse the rude noise I just emitted: 'twas intended to convey disbelief and derision—emotions that would both seem to be wasted on Volo.

4. And making up a lot more to entertain thee. Yes, 'tis Elminster, the Sage of Shadowdale, at thy service in turn. I shall endeavor to curb Volo's worst excesses in these pages.

For a sample of more weighty Volo work, readers are directed to the first Volo's guide to appear in a while: Volo's Guide to Baldur's Gate II. The tome is a tour-sourcebook of the sort that "made" Volo's reputation amongst travelers (of being an indefatigable liar, snob, and glutton, but one can't have everything . . . though Volo tries).

5. Having one's own fan and revel-barker is hardly the thrill some might think; remove and silence him for a few breaths, will ye? Thanks.

Before Volo crows overmuch about his special status, let me say this—and only this—about our relationship. Mystra has charged me with a task that must and shall remain secret for now, but for which Volo's future presence and participation is necessary. Wherefore I must keep him alive—or, I suppose, undead—for the nonce. Being the grasping creature he so lamentably is, Volo has taken advantage of my protection to boldly promenade in public once more, resuming his devour-many-meals travels about Faerûn with, as ye say, a vengeance.

Bear with me, and together we shall endure him for as long as need be. If 'twill make thy reading more bearable, remember this: I can force the good Volo to address topics Ed of the Greenwood conveys unto me thy desire to hear more about.

Aumrauth is a strong, peaceful kingdom at present, but it has a history of making war on the sailors of Calimshan, and of its rulers being assassinated by ambitious would-be successors. Its prominent families include the houses of Alluth (pronounced "Al-OOth"), Ceretlan ("SEER-tlann"), Duthjuth, Gourael, Ildroun, Jaglene, Laralytha ("LAR-al-ITH-a"), Meirityn, Nolbrae, Torthtan, and Yundraer.

Elventree

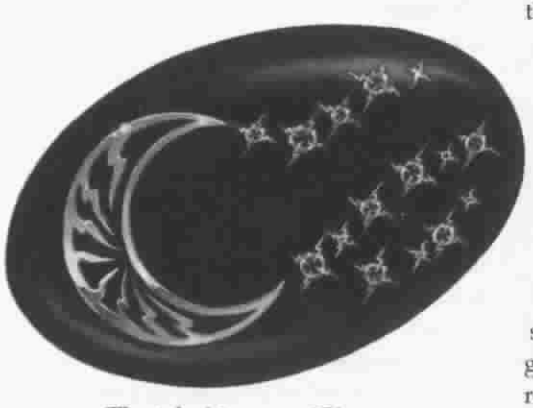
This pastoral wooded village is a trade-moot where elves meet with humans and others. Of its affairs, I've only one tidbit to share: the heraldry used by many of the moon elves who dwell in Elventree.

These fair folk use the following blazon: an oval shield, always worn on the diagonal (slanted upper right to lower left). The field is black and displays a silver crescent moon at its lower left, seeming to fall like a comet, with irregular trails of silver stars streaming from both of its horns.

Several of my sources report that the fair folk of Elventree they've dealt with have been both strong in magic and capably equipped for adventure—something to bear in mind if you're looking to hire elven guides or swords for dangerous ventures.

Evereska

Most have heard of fabled Evermeet, but the similarity of its name to that of Evereska has doomed the latter land to being overlooked by most who dwell far from it, or care not of elven doings. Moreover, the vigilance of the fair folk keeps Evereska cloaked in mystery—but I, of course, have been able to learn something of its trade with the wider world.



The inhabitants of Elventree are strong in arms and magic.

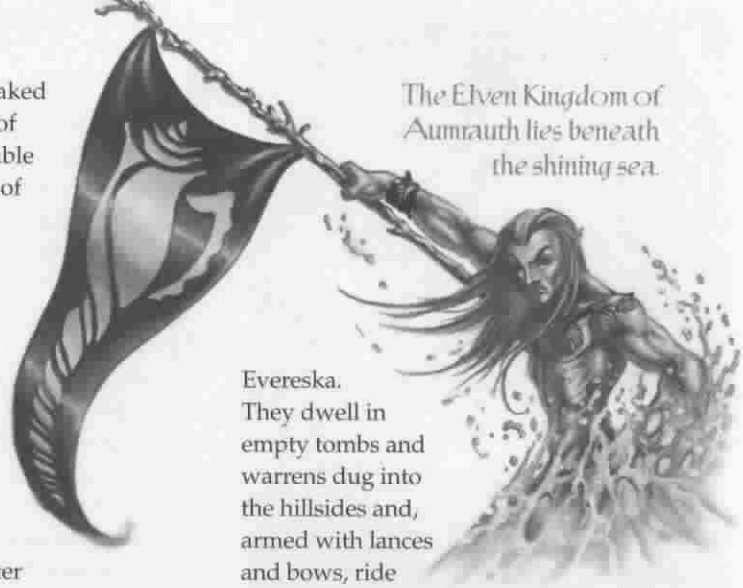
Evereska's few imports are largely trade metals for the elves to shape and enchant into swords. Its fewer exports include beautiful flowing wood sculptures shaped by magic after the wood has died, rather than being carved; certain minor enchanted items such as potions, enspelled arrows, daggers, and the like; and, of course, the highly-prized ruby-hued liquor known as elverquisst. A word of advice: If you'd like to learn elven secrets as I've done here, empty your purse and ply some fair folk with elverquisst, whilst drinking but a swallow yourself. It loosens elven tongues like nothing else!

Even more rarely, traders will see some of the Evereskan summer vine-fruits elverquisst is fermented from: orosks and resmers,[8] which are now found only in Evereska and a few isolated, hidden valleys elsewhere in Faerûn.

The major elven trading families of Evereska include the Alaenree, Coudoarluth, Presrae, and Straeth moon clans, the Shalandalan sylvan family, and the Elond, Immeril, and Naelgrath gold houses.

Greycloak Hills

Often confused with Evereska itself, this region was once a sacred moon elven burial place, but it has become the barracks and training-ground of moon and gold elven warriors through the need to protect the tombs from plunderers. It's now cloaked in more or less constant enchanted mists (akin to wardmists or mythals, some sources say)[9] and is governed by alert, battle-ready elves who mount frequent patrols and are close kin to the elves of Evereska.



The Elven Kingdom of Aumrauth lies beneath the shining sea.

They dwell in empty tombs and warrens dug into the hillsides and, armed with lances and bows, ride horses into battle.

The Hills have no formal blazon, but its warriors often use the badge of an upright, metal, left-hand warrior's gauntlet with blue-white stars at its fingertips, upon a dark purple lightning bolt racing from upper right to lower left and outlined in silver. Out of pride, some elves retain this badge after leaving the Hills.

Lyrandar

This hitherto little-known realm lies in the Chondalwood immediately northwest of the Adder Peaks. A land of well-armed, xenophobic gold elves who try to slay even other elves who intrude,

6. All hail Volo the Tolerant. Fear not, I'm taking exclamation marks away from him upon the instant, for a few paragraphs at least (though Ed has been known to restore them after I do what taste demands be done). Like a small, shouting child, the spectacle of Volo's excitement palls quickly.

7. The wise reader will take all that follows with at least two heaped handfuls of raw sea salt. Volo's tongue and pen are often strangers to the truth.

8. Ye would term an orosk to be a citrus fruit, a cold-climate golden orb akin in tart flavor and delicacy to a mandarin orange, or perhaps a tangerine. A resmer would strike thee as something like a ruby-hued, giant Concord grape.

9. Those "some sources," allowing for Volo's usual exaggeration, would be me, and I would, of course, be correct.

New Elven Magic

While interviewing a Greycloak elf recently, my innate charm and known kindnesses to the fair folk[10] gained me an elven spell that I hereby generously share, gentle readers:

Spellshine

(Alteration, Divination)
Level: 4
Range: 0
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 4
Duration: 4 rounds/level
Area of Effect: Special
Saving Throw: Special

This spell causes the caster's eyes to glow a vivid blue, a manifestation that might alarm others. While a *spellshine* lasts, its caster can clearly see the extent and locations (including precise outlines of affected areas, sigils, and other symbols) of magic recently cast or unleashed by a particular being. Such magical residues appear, to the caster's eyes, to glow a bright blue, standing out from their surroundings even in bright sunlight or in complete darkness. (Seeing magical glyphs, symbols, runes, or wardings by use of this magic doesn't trigger them, though caster actions that touch or disturb them activate them in accordance with their usual triggers.) Magic affecting only the target being or cast on a creature or item that has since been removed leaves behind only a small swirling cloud at the point of casting.

Though observations made by *spellshine*-sight might suggest the actions or path of travel of a target being, the spell itself gives no hint as to direction of travel or type of magic unleashed. A *spellshine* persists without need for a continuous trail of in-range magical "spoor."

The target being must be a creature the caster has touched within the preceding 6 hours. (Direct skin to skin contact must have occurred.) Alternatively, the caster must have possession of at least three drops of the target's blood (which are consumed in spellcasting).

The *spellshine* can "see" only magic worked in the immediate past (1 hour into the past per level of the caster), persists and remains active through other castings, and can be ended instantly by will of the caster, whose eyes instantly return to their usual appearance. A prematurely ended spellshine can't be reawakened; its magic is exhausted.

The material components of a *spellshine* are one tear from each of the caster's eyes and a piece of any material previously burned by magic, immersed in an enchanted liquid, buried in earth or sand that has been affected by magic, and bathed in magical radiance. The material itself can be of any size larger than the caster's smallest fingernail, and can be either organic or inorganic. Charcoal lumps and melted droplets of glass are popular choices.

10. *Mystra forfend! "Innate charm," indeed! The "known kindness" Volo practiced here was to steal a scroll from a war-wounded elf he was pestering with impertinent questions. Thus is history rewritten by glib tongues! See ye next column, wherein my endeavor will be to keep Volo largely to words both useful and relevant—even if I fail in steering him closer to that elusive thing known as "truth."*

Iyrandrar boasts little of interest to the outside world beyond gemstone deposits and lumber that can be had with far less trouble elsewhere. Its elders live a life of effete and sophisticated luxury, but its youngsters are sent forth into wider Faerûn to explore, learn, and bring back new ideas, items, and the like. A very few Iyrandrii like "the world outside" and become traders for the realm, bartering sapphires and rubies for small, valuable items (metal vessels and hardware in particular).

Iyrandrar seems to have few magical items, but it is able to defend itself with dart-guns (carried even by children, these fire missiles tipped with a paralyzing venom and are used to hunt small game) and the swords of its warriors, as well as the spells of many powerful mages.

The arms of Iyrandrar consist of a horizontal brown branch studded with green leaves or buds at its left end, which turns into a black, clutching falcon's claw at its right end, all on a field of gold.

The realm mounts patrols of thirty warriors or more, and it is ruled by Lords (garrison and settlement commanders) and Elder Lords (the nobility, of whom an inner circle of about a dozen, the Ardreth, really rule). Iyrandrar has a Lord Speaker—always an old, formerly famous male warrior—who proclaims the will of the Ardreth, but he has no real power, being a servant of the Ardreth rather than a member of it. He does pronounce justice in those disputes that aren't settled by death-duels.

Mlossae

Located in the Great Sea around the Shipgrave Isles, this is a large, prosperous, war-ready realm. Its warrior-elves wear battle armor made from the barbed plates of hardened giant seashells. They occasionally ride giant squids or octopi who can lift their tentacles up above the surface to hurl boulders at passing surface ships. These elves are ruled by the Deep King, Baerdelcoam the Bluebearded, who's said to be an elf as tall as a triton, and who keeps many wives with whom he's sired countless children.

Legends say Mlossae guards several sunken, ancient cities of men, and from them the Mlossam have taken many magical items that they now handle expertly in battle.

Narbeth

This secretive kingdom of gold elves lies along the northern fringes of Shalhoond, the Great Wild Wood east of the Spiderhaunt Peaks. Narbeth is ruled by Great King Aumanas Raryndur, a ruler who leads his people in their favorite pastime: hunting. They spend days racing through the forest on foot (though some sages swear that Narbathan gold elves can *dimension door* when they wish) pursuing stags, wild boar, and more fearsome monsters. The Shalhoond abounds with such creatures, and it is said to be a surface colony of the strange monster-belching creatures known as deepspawn. Some folk believe the Narbathan went on expeditions and fetched the deepspawn to provide endless sport.

Narbathan drink potent berry wine, lack much of the hauteur and "sophisticated" ways of other gold elves, and tend to be far more practical and possessed of a sense of humor. They rarely venture outside their land. In fact, they seem not to desire trade or contact with the wider world and are, by all accounts, a contented people.The Raryndur ruling family has held the throne of Narbeth for thousands of years, and they have had no serious rivals since the presumed extinction of the house of Oumryn—though there are constant rumors of escaped Oumryndar dwelling elsewhere in Faerûn, plotting to conquer Narbeth.

Nindrol

This small realm lies in the Sea of Swords around the island of Toaridge-at-the-Sun's-Setting. Nindrol consists of labyrinths of coral, including "stacks" that rival the largest castle turrets of surface-dwellers. It is home to a highly skilled, green-skinned, and blue-haired breed of aquatic elves who always seem frolicsome.

Nindrollen often sport with the pirates of the Nelanther or with the crews of merchant ships passing their realm, and they have been known to drag wrecked skiffs and dinghies up from the depths to rescue shipwrecked sailors who are about to drown.

Nindrol is ruled by the petite but wildly energetic Queen Vaervenshalice, who has six daughters, the Princesses Paeraeroyal—named after their dead father, King Elpaerae—who have somehow inherited or acquired magical means to come ashore for brief periods and dwell among men.

When bored, the Princesses slip ashore and pose as travelers on the coastal roads to make sport with surface elves or men. They're the source of the ballads "She Walked Out on the Waves" and "My Lady of the Moonlight." It's thought one of them recently caught the eye of the infamous Elaith Craulnoble of Waterdeep and was the reason his agents scoured certain stretches of ground just south of the city. If the ballads can be trusted, at least one of them answers to the name "Nanalethalee."

Ondroth

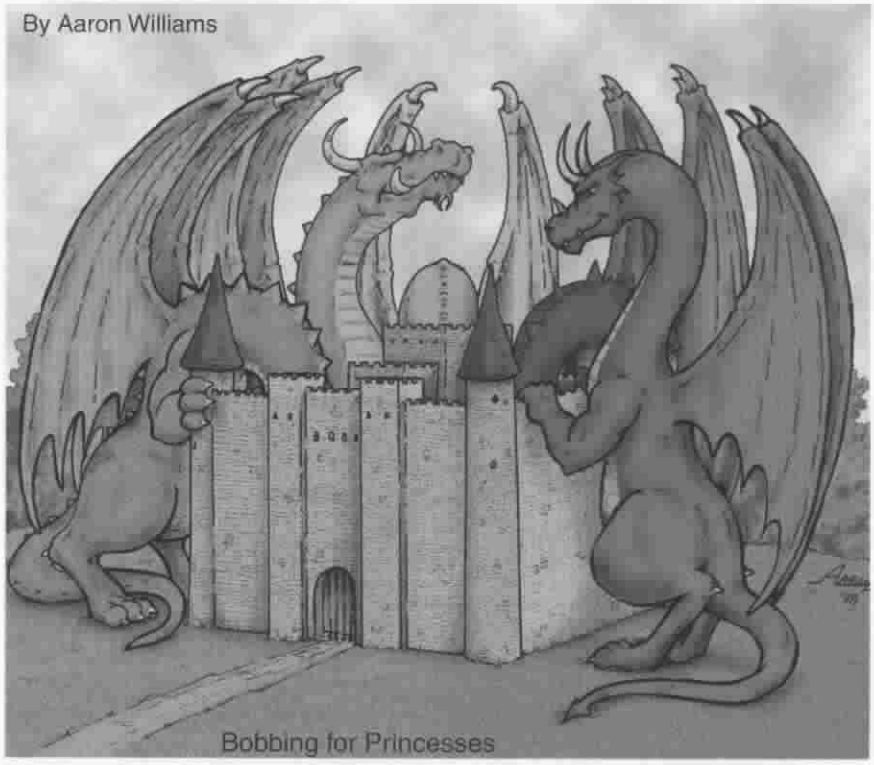
I know little about this land beyond what a single source told me—but he was a sea elf of advanced age, and I've no reason to doubt his words. Ondroth encompasses the undersea flanks of that peninsula of Tethyrian land known

Lyrandar is a land of elves who do not welcome human intrusion.

to most as the Dragon's Head. It's a fledgling, underpopulated land of elves who've broken away from Nindrol to form their own independent realm. They seem to have a number of self-proclaimed, rival rulers and exist more as shifting groups of families wandering from cavern to cavern rather than as an organized kingdom.

It's now over thirty years since Ed Greenwood started writing about the FORGOTTEN REALMS® *setting with a tale about the troubles of a particular fat merchant by the name of Mirt, as it happens. Not all that much has changed down the years. Mirt's still in trouble, and still fat. Oh, wait, there is one change: Ed's fat now, too.*

By Aaron Williams



Bobbing for Princesses

Great Rewards

Money and magic are only the most obvious rewards.

by Brian Dunnell

illustrated by Joe Pillsbury

WHEN THIEVES FOIL A WICKED DEATH TRAP, WHEN fighters slay a vicious dragon, and when wizards discern the true nature of a cunning plot, they expect to be rewarded. Every adventurer knows that with great risk comes great reward. Players and Dungeon Masters often see the cycle of bigger treasure-hoards and more powerful magical items as the only possible rewards for adventuring. Initially exciting, this approach eventually becomes tiresome and can lead to the dreaded Monty Haul campaign.

From the roleplaying point of view, monetary rewards are not always realistic. In all likelihood, kings and guildmasters who recruit adventurers to perform great tasks do not have the cash on hand to reward adventurers commensurate with the adventurers' skill or the challenge they face. How much is defeating a great wyrm worth? How about a major demon? A mighty necromancer? Even rulers who have the resources to provide appropriate compensation are probably unwilling to empty out their treasuries. Running a kingdom, a guild, or a church costs money and hard currency is a precious commodity.

Magic is also a rare and precious resource. A ruler might loan a magical item to an adventurer for the duration of service, but that ruler should be unwilling to throw such precious resources away as a gift or reward. People in positions of power and influence husband their magical resources as much as possible, giving them to important and loyal retainers, rather than common adventurers. Leaders who squander money and magic will not rule for long.

Rulers, guildmasters, and others in positions of power have more plentiful resources at their disposal. Why should a king hand out cash he will never see again when he can bestow a title, a parcel of land on his kingdom's frontier, and a few common soldiers? Instead of paying off adventurers for good, the ruler can invest in new and proven vassals, keeping them close at hand. Using rewards other than money or magical items also provides excellent avenues for roleplaying and hooks for future adventures.

Titles

A title can be a rank, such as knight or lord, or it might be associated with some great deed, like Wyrm-slayer or Elf-friend. At the very least, a title conveys respect. In some societies, titles carry special privileges. For example, lords might have to provide food and lodging to passing knights. Titles might also convey responsibilities. When the king musters his army, every able-bodied knight in the realm might have to report for service.

Memberships

Memberships in guilds and organizations can be extremely useful. Guilds often give preferential treatment to their own members. A goldsmiths' guild might exchange currency and offer appraising at a discount. A mages' guild might maintain a common library for members' use. A thieves' guild might operate safe houses and intelligence networks that members can use. Such organizations can put adventurers in touch with specialists and artisans. A mages' guild might know how to contact a particular sage. A thieves' guild might know where a safe-cracker can be found. Guilds can use their influence on their members' behalf. The goldsmith's guild might intervene with the local tax collector on behalf of an adventuring party. The thieves' guild might arrange bail for a cut-purse picked up by the authorities. Memberships in such organizations also come with a price. Members are expected to support the organization, just as the organization supports its members.

Introductions

Letters of introduction can be very useful. It can be difficult to meet with influential and powerful people. They are busy in the first place, and their handlers protect them from being overwhelmed by petty petitioners in the second. Knowing the right people can make all the difference. A letter of introduction, a whisper in the right ear, or a personal recommendation can smooth the way. A party of adventurers might want to meet a local guildmaster, the head of a local monastery, or the king of the realm. All of these people might be completely inaccessible without the right connections.

Letters of Writ, Marque, and Note

Permission can be a powerful thing. A letter of marque gives permission to sailors to raid an enemy nation's ships, turning a pirate into a commerce raider. A note from a lord advising his vassals to provide any and all service to the bearer could expedite transportation, food, lodging, and other services. Such memoranda could waive local laws, like a "license to kill" for a royal assassin, or papers that allow unrestricted travel in a policed autocracy. Of course, such papers can be forged, or—to the wrong party—can be a condemnation rather than a reward.

Followers, Henchmen, and Lackeys

Men come cheap. Those in power can provide all manner of retainers. Some might be common soldiers or servants who relieve their masters of day-to-day duties. Others might be more skilled—artisans such as armorers and smiths, body guards, and elite troops. Still others might be highly skilled—spies, sages, novice warriors, priests, mages, or thieves. These followers are loyal and provide service as long as their new master stays in the good graces of whoever provided them in the first place. Generally their first loyalty will be to their overall patron. Some might even report to their patrons and keep them informed about their current master's comings and goings.

Unspecified Favors

One of the most valuable rewards of all is the unspecified favor. This favor might be called in at some later date or can be traded to another for their use. Having the head of the city watch or the high priest of the local

Writs, medals, and servants are good choices for nonmonetary rewards.

temple owe you a favor can be valuable indeed. Experienced lords will not offer unspecified favors lightly. Debts have a habit of being called in at the most inopportune times.

Services

Services are one of the easiest ways for a debt to be paid and a valuable reward to the receiver. Services are always commensurate with a person's skills and resources. An innkeeper might offer free room and lodging, a blacksmith, free work, a wizard, free magical identifications. If such services are abused, the giver is likely to become disgruntled and revoke the privilege, especially as adventurers' past deeds fade from memory.

Quality Goods and Keepsakes

These items might be rare and difficult to obtain, such as elven ashwood-bows, or might carry value, such as wine or spices, or might convey respect from those who recognize them, such as a ring from the finger of the king or a scarf from the queen. Such items are often given in conjunction with other rewards, such as land and titles. Rare and valuable items are more difficult to use for wealth than cash, requiring specialized merchants to sell them. Keepsakes can identify the bearer to enemies as well as friends.

Land

A powerful ruler such as a king might have limited funds but plenty of land. Land is easily given away in frontier kingdoms and is often used to entice settlers and soldiers to civilize the land. Land provides adventurers with a place to build a base of operations and a certain degree of respectability. In time, it might even provide income from settlers paying taxes. Those providing land can monitor allies because they know where to find them. Land can be taken back as easily as it is given, providing rulers with leverage when dealing with adventurers. Having a permanent base of operations provides a degree of safety but also gives enemies a place to attack.

Income

A lord might not be able to reward adventurers with a vast sum of cash all at once, but he might be able to provide a reasonable stipend over time. This might take the form of a specific stipend to be drawn monthly or annually, or it might be enough cash to support a lifestyle or a group of retainers. Stipends free adventurers from the day-to-day concerns of money. A wizard's research might be sponsored; a warrior's army quartered; a regular donation made to a priest's church. Stipends allow a liege a certain degree of control over their retainers' actions. A stipend can be raised, lowered, or even taken away to reward or punish.

Information

Another extremely valuable commodity is information. A royal wizard might know the command word to a PC's magical item. A thief's guildmaster might know the location of a rare spell component. A lord might know just what happened to an adventurer's lost brother. Of course, information can be false or misleading and might be desired by other interested parties

This list is by no means all-inclusive. It is merely meant to suggest several alternatives to monetary and magical rewards. Just as these ideas can be used to reward adventurers, cash-strapped adventurers might use these ideas to compensate their own retainers and allies.

Brian's campaign has heavy political underpinnings, but he assures us he is no way influenced by his experiences working for the government in Washington, DC.

by Wolfgang Baur

Spy Satellites in the DARK · MATTER™ Game

ALTERNITY

illustrated by rk post

EYE IN THE SKY

No matter where you go, satellites are watching. In the DARK·MATTER setting, they are also recording your phone calls, directing laser attacks against you—maybe they're even reading your mind.

Satellite images are © 1999 Aerial Images, Inc. and © 1999 SovinformSputnik

The use of aerial surveillance to keep tabs on people and armies from a distance has a long history. The use of balloons for aerial observation began during the Civil War in the United States. Orbital satellites are just the logical extension of recon balloons and the U2 and SR-71 spy planes.

In the DARK•MATTER setting, these satellites are more than merely observation platforms; they are weapons to achieve larger and more nefarious goals, including occult activities as well as the detection and suppression of alien species. The existence and deployment of spy satellites makes for a perfect foil for adventures.

Reading Headlines from Orbit

The techniques used by spy satellites have changed drastically since 1960. The Corona satellite took images from a low orbit of about 100 to 125 miles, then ejected a film capsule that literally parachuted back to earth. Specially equipped Air Force planes captured those capsules in midair to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. The entire program was overseen by the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), which was so secret that its existence and even its logo were classified. U.S. government officials finally acknowledged it in 1992.

The first-generation Corona satellites were replaced by Argon and Lanyard satellites (and presumably even newer systems whose names remain classified). The first spy camera, the KH-1 or "Keyhole," was progressively replaced by more advanced systems (KH-1 to KH-9). Corona used the KH-9 until the program ended in 1972. The practice of spying from orbit didn't end in 1972; the Corona satellites were simply retired and replaced by the Hexagon satellites.

Hexagon is a redundant digital real-time system. At least two of its satellites are in orbit over any given point on the Earth at any particular time (from roughly 75 degrees North latitude to 75 degrees South). While image resolution has improved steadily over the years from 2 meters for Corona KH-1 to about 10 cm for today's military satellites, the most important breakthrough of all might have been the introduction of the KH-11 camera in 1976. This camera and all subsequent Keyhole cameras use charge-couple devices to digitize images and relay them to earth in real time. The digital imagery can be manipulated to extrapolate data, filling in holes, adding dimensions, or taking out clutter. It can search for particular images, such as a tank silhouette.

Foreign & Corporate Systems

U.S. systems aren't the only ones orbiting the earth, of course. Soviet Zenit spy systems came online not long after the American satellites, in 1962; Soviet space technology looked down at the U.S. naval embargo and the U.S. ICBM silos during the Cuban missile crisis. All the modern Russian civilian satellite systems—most prominently, the Cosmos and Resource systems—are based directly on the 40-year-old Zenit technology. Unlike the Hexagon and Corona systems, the Russian satellites provide photos to the public as well as to the Russian intelligence services.

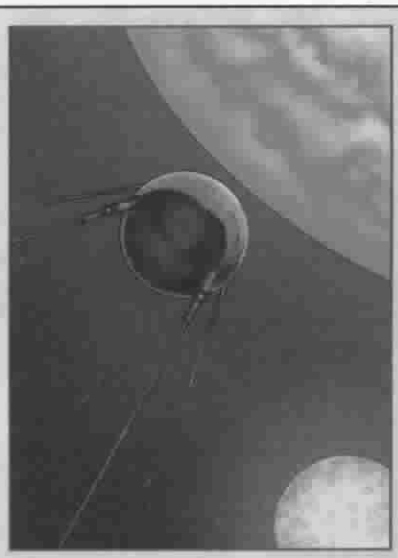
In addition to satellites constructed and operated by foreign governments, the orbital environment has recently become filled with private telecommunications and data relay satellites, as well as devices quietly launched by private organizations like the Bilderbergers for their own purposes. Generally sent up on Russian or Chinese launch vehicles, these satellites are strictly private ventures that are answerable to no one. That they are used in illegal invasions of privacy, in monitoring the status of tracking devices implanted on U.S. citizens, or simply in recording the movements of a few of the world's most important power brokers is a given. Answerable to no civilian authority, the controllers of these satellites can do as they please.

Blueprints & Specifications

Most satellites are purely functional machines, with no consideration for human visits, repair, or habitation. They are typically about 3 meters across, with a wingspan of about 12.5 meters for those satellites using solar power. They have an operational weight of about 1,000 kilograms (1,250 with a full load of hydrazine fuel for maneuvers). Since each satellite is built to order, they vary from model to model, and some are considerably larger or smaller. However, size and weight are not the critical factors once a satellite has reached orbit. A satellite's two most important technical details are its orbit and its resolution.

The orbit determines how often a satellite passes over a particular part of the globe. (Typically, a low Earth orbit satellite passes over a region once per day by following a high-inclination, low altitude polar orbit.) These low orbits are usually only about 1,000 kilometers high, and the satellites orbit the earth every couple hours. Communication satellites, by contrast, usually sit in geosynchronous orbit, 35,700 kilometers above the earth, where they rotate around the earth at the same speed that the earth itself rotates (and thus remain stationary relative to the Earth's surface).

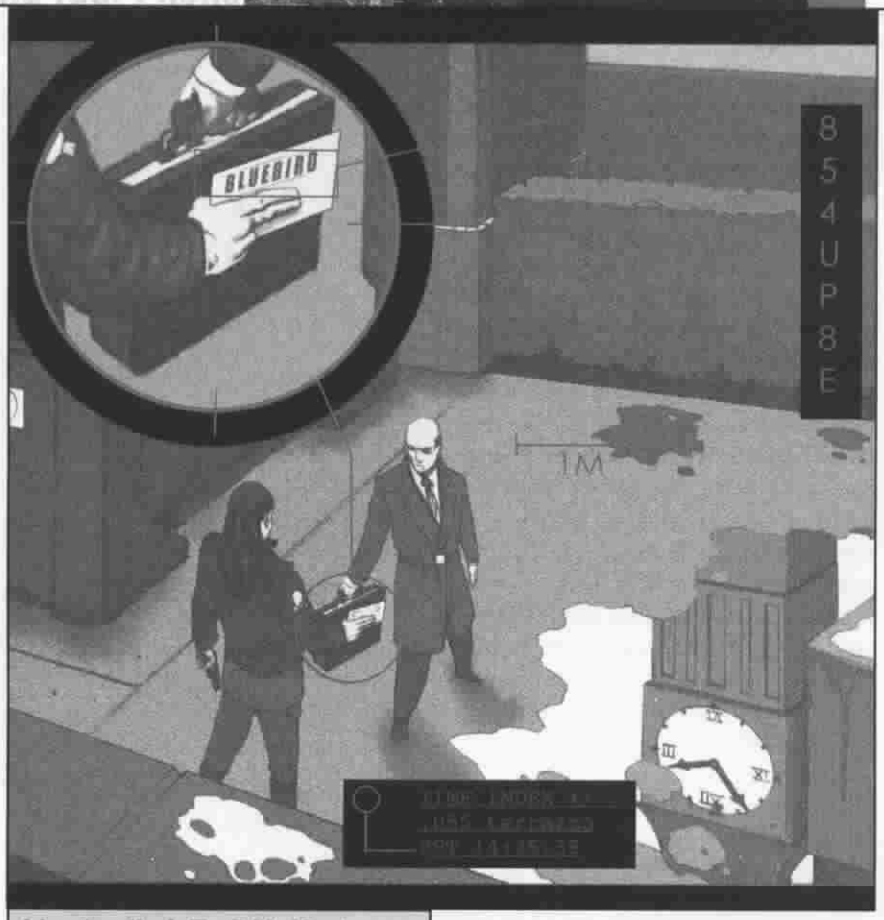
Since the footprint of an imaging satellite can cover thousands of square kilometers, only four or five satellites are needed to provide complete coverage of



Born in the Cold War

The first full-bore spy satellite program, Corona, started in the United States in 1960. Its goal was to generate images of bases deep inside the Soviet Union, and it succeeded even beyond its designer's expectations, offering millions of photographs of bombers, missile silos, and remote military installations that were simply unobtainable through any other means.

Since then, spy satellites have grown more accurate and far more numerous. Most are tightly guarded military systems, with access restricted to national military planners. But a few nations, primarily France and Russia, offer images to anyone willing to pay a modest price, roughly $700 per image ($800 for color). This has made information gathering easier for large and small corporations, for the cash-strapped spy agencies of smaller nations, and for the members of conspiracies and secret societies.



Adventure Hook: The Orbital Pentagram

A private U.S. corporation with links to the Final Church has recently shown great interest in launching a strange network of twenty-six linked satellites. A friendly contact from the Knights of Malta calls the heroes' branch of the Institute with information about these plans, promising to meet them to discuss it. The emailed notes get through, but the friend is discovered ritually murdered and drained of blood.

The more the heroes investigate, the stranger the satellites seem: They are armed with lasers and jamming equipment, are inscribed inside and out with occult symbols, and are capable of bouncing those lasers among each other to create a huge reflected web of light around the earth. Is the Final Church hoping to attack its enemies from space? Or does it hope to create a vast pentagram of orbital laser light, turning earth itself into a sacrifice to infernal powers? Are the satellites meant to exert mind control, or is that just disinformation and paranoia to conceal their true purpose? The adventure comes to a head when sunspot activity on the surface of the Sun flares up enormously. This could be a blessing that disables the entire infernal network, turning the satellites into space junk—or it could be just the result that the satellites were intended to achieve, bringing Luciferans through a doorway to visit the cultists who summoned them.

90% of the earth's surface. Doubling that number provides a reserve for each area in the event of failure (something that real-world agencies usually provide for but James-Bond-style villains often neglect).

The satellite's resolution determines what it can see. A 10–meter resolution can see buildings, large planes, and other objects 10 meters long or larger. Today's best satellites are believed to have a resolution in the 10 centimeter range, but those are strictly for the best-equipped National Reconnaissance Office surveillance missions and are not available to the public. The best civilian satellites are in the 1-meter range, able to see cars, people, back yards, crops, dogs, and so on, as if their pictures were taken from a low-flying plane. To see sample images (or to buy a satellite photo of a particular place), take a look at the images at <www.terraserver.com>.

A satellite view is completely vertical; anything not visible from the top is invisible to the satellite. In addition, most satellites images are limited by prevailing conditions. Cloud cover exists over about 40% of the world at any given time, eliminating a satellite's ability to see a target. Likewise, nightfall or even a forest canopy can hide a target from view. And satellite images can be fooled; spray painting a long black strip on a desert landscape and plunking plywood roofs onto the ground can make it appear as if an air base has been constructed virtually overnight. Likewise, dummy aircraft or tanks—stripped of engines, weapons, and armor—can fool observers overhead. Even when the pictures are legitimate, a trained photorecon interpreter is often required to determine what's what; images reveal more information to a trained observer than someone without experience. (See the "Satellite Mechanics" sidebar for details.)

Beginning in 1987, a few specialized satellites were launched that used an active form of observation rather than passive photography. These synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellites can look through clouds and through the dark of night—even through small layers of sand or camouflage netting. Surprisingly, today the French government sells such images to civilians. However, even this technology has its limits. At the moment, no satellite can see through a steel or concrete hangar or building.

Similarly, tracking a quickly-moving target, such as a plane or even a car, can be difficult. This is because the cameras are so distant and so sensitive; maintaining a series of turns and corrections to follow a car moving and stopping in city traffic is quite a feat from 1,000 kilometers up. For all of these reasons, spy satellites are best used to take pictures of stationary objects over time, such as airfields, missile silos, and bunkers.

Tapping Your Phone, Your Radar ... Your SAM Battery

While most people think of spy satellites as cameras first and foremost, just as many are SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) satellites as are involved in photo reconnaissance. These satellites intercept radio and TV broadcasts, phone conversations, faxes, and even wireless airplane and cell phone communications.

The first of these communications-tapping satellites sent aloft by the U.S. were called Rhyolite (launched in 1970). Its successors were Aquacade, Chalet, Magnum,

and now Orion. They are parked much higher above the earth than photo recon satellites; SIGINT satellites travel in geosynchronous orbits, about 35,700 kilometers above the Earth, and listen in with 22-meter-wide antenna. They can monitor thousands of phone calls simultaneously and can intercept car phones, walkie talkies, radar stations, and missile telemetry. In the U.S., these intercepts are monitored by the NSA at Fort Meade, Maryland.

Just as famous as the satellites themselves is the data-integration system that the NSA uses to make sense of the incredible tower of babble that is modern telecommunications. The NSA system is called Echelon, and it is run jointly by the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States to track primarily civilian rather than military communications. (The armed forces have their own systems for monitoring foreign military communications.) The Echelon system depends on both satellites and undersea cable taps to intercept all important world communications, though primarily those in Europe, North America, and the Pacific. It uses incredibly sophisticated computation power to analyze the millions upon millions of emails, phone calls, and other messages every day. Echelon does this by searching for a preset group of key words defined by its internal "dictionary." These key words or search strings might be phone numbers, the name of a dictator, drug lord, or conspiracy leader, calls made in a particular language or by a particular individual, or words such as "atomic" or "alien" or "drugs," depending on the nation's security interests of the moment. While the system is not foolproof, it generally can find most of what it seeks—if the NSA knows where to look. Technically, the NSA is forbidden from using the system against U.S. citizens, but in practice no one exercises any day-to-day oversight, and abuses of the system are easy for people with the right government connections.

It's worth mentioning that communication satellites are more susceptible to disruption than photorecon satellites. In 2002, the Earth is near the peak of a sunspot cycle, and satellite communications do suffer accordingly during these outbreaks. The vagaries of satellite jamming are kept hidden from the general public, but attempts by many industrial nations to disrupt their enemies' communications do occur when small wars grow serious. In some cases, however, such as the border wars between India and Pakistan, neither side has anything to gain from disrupting the regional satellite: They both depend on the same hardware for their own messages. Disruption at the communication satellite dishes on the ground is more effective in these cases.

Agricultural & Archaeological Techniques

Some satellite reconnaissance involves using radar-based SAR methods to find things kept hidden from ordinary photoreconnaisance. These unusual targets include archaeologists searching for buried or underground structures, farmers and agricultural ministers tracking crops and fallow fields from space, and even police and customs officials pinpointing drug fields, laboratories, smuggling, and interdiction.

For instance, the European Union uses a pale blue, flowering plant to ensure that fields that aren't supposed to be planted are, in fact, fallow. The plant's blossoms reflect a particular spectrum of light back into space, a spectrum that is quite distinct from that reflected by wheat or maize or barley. Any farmer who doesn't plant what he claims in this satellite-monitored field can be sure to receive a visit from the Ministry of Agriculture.

The detection of coca plants, cannabis, and poppies from orbit is just as easy, making detecting drug-producing fields easier for law enforcement. Although few people will discuss it, these same techniques also track human populations, poachers, dark matter concentrations, and possibly even the movement of alien species. In particular, the Center for Xenological Studies (CXS) in Washington, DC, uses multispectrum analysis to find and track invasive alien species that appear within regions monitored by the AFT.

Shutter Control

While anyone can buy a picture of an area from SPOT—the French civilian recon company—or from private U.S. vendors like terraserver.com, not just any picture is freely available to the public. Only "friendly" governments and citizens can obtain access to certain photos, and some areas of French and allied security is simply unavailable. For instance, Groom Lake photos are not released to the public, nor are photos of the French nuclear testing sites in the South Pacific, Russian gulags in Siberia, and certain particularly benighted portions of Texas.

The nation owning a satellite can exert "shutter control," allowing that nation to turn off the stream of images from a satellite during military maneuvers, weapon testing, or especially during a war. Because of this, nations like Japan, China, India, Israel, and South Africa

Satellite Mechanics

Commandeering someone else's satellite requires sending the proper radio signals and interpreting a returning stream of data. In game terms, this requires a successful System Operation–*communications* roll, though most satellite commands are so routine they do not require a skill check. For unusually difficult tasks (such as tracking a moving object or finding targets hidden under partial cover), a complex skill check might be required.

Heroes might try to gain access to satellite resources that don't belong to them. This requires a successful System Operation–*communications* roll to establish a radio link, then a Computer Science–*hacking* complex skill check to break in. The level of difficulty depends on the satellite's age and security measures: An old bird might require only 2 successes, while a modern military satellite might require 6 to 9.

Not every satellite understands commands given in English, adding yet another layer of difficulty to commandeering foreign satellites. Hijacking these devices requires fluency in the appropriate foreign language, or at least a skilled translator able to perform simultaneous translation of technical jargon. These foreign satellites expect their instructions to be delivered in Chinese or Korean, pictograms, Cyrillic letters, or Japanese kanji.

Once in control of a satellite, the heroes have access to its stream of data but not its core guidance system. Seizing control of a satellite guidance system requires an Amazing difficulty complex skill check. If they succeed, the heroes can use Vehicle Operation–*space vehicle* to maneuver the satellite to view any target.

Interpreting the full results from satellite observation requires training, but in most cases, a hero can interpret the basic structures at a site with a successful Knowledge–*deduce* roll. For a more detailed interpretation, a System Operation–*sensors* roll is required.

Adventure Hook: The Breeder

An electromagnetic life form has infected an orbiting satellite deep in space and now plans to take it on a joy ride. In fact, the creature has learned to manipulate electrical signals inside the command-and-control circuits to force the satellite into a decaying orbit. Once it has gone through re-entry, the creature promptly infects a member of the satellite recovery team sent out to retrieve it.

Infecting a human host requires a few hours of adjustment, but then the host is under the creature's control and begins exhibiting strange behavior, including a sudden obsession with electronics of all kinds. When the host's actions draw attention, the creature jumps out of its host and into the phone system, crossing the wires as a "pure" electrical signal, perhaps shutting down the local phone system for a few hours until the irregular burst of power is repaired.

Tracking the creature down is a challenge; destroying or capturing it is even more difficult. Perhaps the heroes can trick it onto a specially insulated satellite about to be shot right into orbit, or perhaps they can't capture it without arcane FX.

have launched their own satellites to gain a better view of targets and threats that might surround them. The United Arab Emirates and the Ukraine are acquiring satellites as quickly as possible.

Attack Satellites

To counter all this orbital activity, the U.S. has developed special weapon systems with a single purpose, the so-called satellite killers. These kinetic energy weapons are satellites that work by first finding and then smashing into other satellites, destroying them both. No nation has admitted to deploying any such weapon; their real strength and real numbers will only be acknowledged after they have been used to cripple a hostile power's communications relays or its surveillance satellites.

The principles behind these weapons are straightforward. Kinetic attack satellites are often parked in variable orbit to allow them maximum flexibility in choosing targets. These elliptical orbits have a perigee of just 2,000 kilometers above the Earth and an apogee of 20,000 kilometers. Each weapon is launched into orbit on a rocket and then releases "kill vehicles," each of which is slightly bigger than a fire hydrant.

Once in orbit, the kill vehicles maneuver to a target using reaction thrusters and destroy their target by smashing into it. The real trick is to destroy the satellite without creating so much space junk that the satellite destroys some of its neighbors as well. In ALTERNITY game terms, they are guided High Impact weapons with –1 accuracy and Good damage that inflicts d6+1s/d6+1w/d6+3w. The first of these anti-satellite systems flew in 1997, funded by a small research program that operated quietly under the Bush and Clinton administrations. Estimates are that up to ten such weapons might be in place by the year 2000, to assert U.S. control of space in the case of emergency.

The US has also developed weapons that strike from orbit against targets within the Earth's atmosphere. The newest generation of U.S. attack satellites is the SBL, or "space-based laser" series launched in the early 00s. Putatively designed as part of an anti-ballistic missile defense during the 1980s and 1990s, they use hydrogen fluoride lasers combined with 10-meter wide concentrating mirrors to destroy missiles shortly after launch, destroying roughly one missile per second and up to several hundred targets each. Weighing roughly 77,000 pounds, these gigantic weapons are capable of destroying several hundred targets before running out of energy. Currently, four of these satellites are deployed in a LEO about 1,300 kilometers above the Earth; the plan is to deploy a full twenty such weapons by 2010. However, their enormous weight has made launching them difficult; their incredible military value means that none of these satellites can be trusted to a Chinese, European, or Russian launch vehicle.

However, the system is not perfect. For one, the SBLs cannot hit ground-based targets; the water vapor in the atmosphere absorbs their energy before they reach the surface. This limits them to destroying ballistic missiles (the job they were designed for), plus destroying other satellites, military aircraft, and even commercial aircraft flying more than 4 kilometers up (roughly 13,000 feet). U.S. Department of Defense scientists and Israeli scientists are cooperating to produce new SBLs with wavelengths that can penetrate clouds and other sources of water vapor, to be able to attack ground targets. When attacking vehicles, these lasers inflict Good firepower energy damage. They damage vehicular targets for d6w/d8w/d4+1m, with –1 accuracy. It is capable of autofire and has a range of roughly 4,000/6,000/8,000 kilometers.

Adventure Hook: Loss of Shutter Control

When a border war flares up in the Golden Triangle between the Shan and a U.S. proxy government, the U.S. watches the action through one of its many Hexagon satellites. Unfortunately, someone has compromised the control codes, and the satellite is turned against the U.S. The heroes must find out who has taken control and how: Perhaps telekinetic abilities are being used, or perhaps it was taken over by Bilderberger or Knights of Malta operatives who feel their need for its information is greater.

Regardless of the source, the heroes must fight their way into the new ground control station and re-establish control of the satellite before its telemetry is used to coordinate a missile attack, pinpoint U.S. troops, or otherwise harm the government's efforts to contain the Shan.

Paranormal and Highly Classified

On occasion, the Hoffmann Institute acquires information or tips regarding a class of oddball satellites. These aberrant satellites are often mentioned but never detailed in the fringe press. They include devices devoted to obscure and classified projects in experimental physics, laser satellites that blind individual targets, kinetic energy weapons that strike from orbit with the force of a tactical nuclear weapon, and even mind control satellites.

Though no nation admits to owning, deploying, or even researching such satellites, the multi-billion dollar black budgets of the space-going industrialized nations have plenty of room for such schemes. Proof of their existence is sketchy, however, and generally limited to witness statements or the reports of supposed weapons-research insiders. Typically, their stories are impossible to verify.

Wolfgang Baur is the designer of the DARK•MATTER Campaign Setting. In his spare time, he struggles to master arcane computer codes, reads volumes of esoteric technical data, and tinkers with his mind control lasers.

TRANSMISSIONS

By Andy Collins, JD Wiker, and Jeff "Zippy" Quick

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Gamemaster Hints

The heroes have received an invitation to a Mutual UFO Network conference in Lexington, Kentucky. The heroes witness one of the speakers, Alva Mayhill, a former analyst for the Hoffmann Institute who resigned after an alleged alien abduction, being forced into a black sedan by two men dressed in black suits and wearing dark sunglasses.

Was Alva Mayhill abducted by the Men in Black? Or was her kidnapping merely a hoax orchestrated to generate publicity among the conspiracy-happy convention attendees? As rumors spread about Hoffmann Institute involvement, the pressure increases for the heroes to discover who is really responsible for Alva's disappearance.

DARK•MATTER™

VIRUS ALERT!

A new gridvirus, "Pushover" has been found in the local Aegis grid system. The Pushover virus is memory resident; it infects and destroys cybernetics files in the user's nanocomputer.

Gridpilots in or near the Aegis system are strongly advised to diagnose their wetware immediately. Pushover is extremely dangerous to cyberneticists and Aleerins. Grid users with cybernetic organs in or near Aegis are advised to seek a safe jack-in point and proceed immediately to Inseer and VoidCorp gridsites for anti-virus updates.

The Pushover virus begins by destroying data related to cybernetic operation. Early warning signs of infection include muscle spasms, sensory organ feedback, and reconfigured bioart. Pushover spreads progressively over several days, finally constricting cybernetic musculature into a useless state. Pushover is fatal to victims with cardio-pulmonary cybernetic organs.

Gamemaster Hints

The state of the local grid in Aegis is atrocious. With a little effort, nearly anyone can slip invasive viruses into the system. In this case, a t'sa hacker has created Pushover as revenge on a mechalus business partner who cheated him in the sale of their company.

An infected cybernetic hero will not immediately know of his or her condition. Infection becomes apparent when he or she discovers reconfigured bioart or sees phantom images on cybereyes.

The bioart distortions and sensory ghosts are consistent over time, showing pictures or sounds of the mechalus who cheated his t'sa partner. What will the heroes do when they see him for real?

Dungeoncraft

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By Ray Winninger

Last month, we started to explore the fine art of creating AD&D® adventures and examined the Fourth Rule of Dungeoncraft: ***Challenge both the characters and the players.***

Master the three types of combat encounters: romps, battles of attrition, ***and*** drag-out fights.

This rule means that good adventures give the players plenty of opportunities to think and plenty of opportunities to show off their characters' abilities, spells, and magical items. Last month, we looked at some specific tactics for challenging the players. This month, let's explore similar tactics for challenging their characters.

Challenging the Characters

The biggest attraction of the AD&D game is that it allows the players to assume the roles of bold heroes capable of performing incredible feats. One of the hooks that keeps players returning to the game table is the lure of gaining new levels and acquiring formidable spells, magical items, and capabilities. Obviously, this attraction loses its luster if the players have few opportunities to use those fantastic abilities.

In part, your job as Dungeon Master is to make sure that your adventures are full of situations that test the characters' mettle. Unlike obstacles that force the players themselves to think and make decisions, your goal this time is to design challenges that push the characters' game statistics, spells, and other capabilities to their limits. Generally, such challenges fit into one of three categories, each tailored to the specific class of abilities it tests.

1. Balanced Combats

The most obvious method of challenging the player characters' abilities is to test their skill in battle. Combat is a big part of the AD&D game, and properly balancing the combat is one of the DM's most important responsibilities. Unfortunately, the only way to design a completely balanced encounter is to apply hard-won experience. Until you have this experience, try to err on the side of making the foes too easy for the characters to vanquish. It's easier to add more enemies (or beef up existing enemies) during play than it is to mysteriously remove enemies from the battlefield.

Typical adventures make use of three different types of combat encounters: ***romps, battles of attrition,*** and ***drag-out fights.***

Romps are combats in which the player characters aren't in any danger; they're designed to allow the characters to kick some butt and show off. A good example might be a small party of goblin raiders trying to waylay a party of 6th-level adventurers. Although your ultimate intention is to push their characters' abilities to the limit, allowing them to run amok tends to increase the players' sense of satisfaction and create some good opportunities for roleplaying. Although this formula isn't completely reliable, most encounters in which the total Hit Dice of the opposition is equal to or less than one-fourth the total experience levels of all the adventurers are bound to be romps. In other words, eight orcs (1 Hit Die each, total of 8 Hit Dice) versus four 8th-level characters (total of 32 levels) is a romp.

Battles of attrition are engagements that pit the characters against slightly tougher foes. Although the characters should win these fights, the opposition might be stern enough to inflict a little damage. The idea here is to test the party's stamina. Alone, none of the

Catch up on past installments of Dungeoncraft.
http://www.wizards.com/dragon/Welcome.asp

DO...

1. Provide multiple ways of negotiating each obstacle whenever possible.
2. Use a wide variety of monsters and NPCs when designing the opposition.
3. Give the players plenty of opportunities to roleplay.
4. Make sure that every obstacle the players successfully negotiate rewards them in some way, even if that reward is not obvious.
5. Break up particularly difficult obstacles by placing easier obstacles in between them.
6. Make sure every player has a chance to contribute.
7. Allow the players to receive at least one particularly interesting reward (a special magical item, a favor from an important noble, or another unique benefit) per adventure.
8. Make your maps interesting. Lots of plain, 10' × 10' dungeon corridors get boring quickly.

DON'T...

1. Put the adventurers in a situation where they can perish without warning from a single poor die roll.
2. Forget to give your players something to do when not fighting.
3. Assume the players will tackle your obstacles in any particular order or assume that they'll attempt to overcome any obstacle in one particular way.
4. Assume that all monsters are stupid. Intelligent monsters should construct intelligent defenses.
5. Forget that most monsters and NPCs with access to magical items are going to use those items against invaders. Why would the evil necromancer store his ring of protection in a trunk in his bedroom when he could be wearing it?
6. Force the players to fight several difficult battles in a row without an opportunity to rest. Of course, if their own mistakes put them in this position, it's another matter entirely.

battles presents a significant challenge to the heroes' abilities, but a series of these combats should start to inflict a real toll. Do the PCs have enough hit points to withstand the onslaught? Enough healing spells? Encounters in which the total Hit Dice of the opposition is roughly half the total experience levels of the adventurers often fit best into this category.

Drag-out fights are big, climactic battles in which the players face strong opposition. Normally, a drag-out fight is a prelude to the players' receiving some great reward—obtaining valuable treasure, uncovering an important secret, or successfully completing the adventure. Drag-out fights are the hardest combats to balance. The ultimate objective is to make the opposition weak enough that the players will almost certainly win the fight, but strong enough to make the players doubt their chances. As a rule of thumb, when designing your drag-out fights, begin by selecting a group of monsters with total Hit Dice that equal approximately 75% of the total experience levels of all adventurers. Since you're facing a much thinner margin of error when designing these encounters, though, you should be especially careful. Although the "75% Rule" might provide you with a decent starting point when setting up your drag-out fights, in the end you're going to have to trust your judgment. For now, just choose opponents that make the battle seem balanced in your eyes, and then take away one or two enemies or capabilities for good measure.

One of the keys to designing an entertaining adventure is to combine romps, battles of attrition, and drag-out fights in just the right proportion. The best adventurers establish a sort of combat "rhythm." For example, one or two romps can whet the players' appetites. These are followed by a few battles of attrition that lead to the first drag-out fight, which is then followed by a few more romps and then another drag-out fight. From here, the adventurers might face a series of battles of attrition that culminate in the big drag-out fight that serves as the adventure's climax. In effect, you're pacing your adventure in much the same way a good director paces a movie. Place romps in the areas where the surroundings are less interesting and you'd like to speed up the action. Battles of attrition are a good way to provide the players with the feeling that they are slowly but steadily advancing toward some goal. Drag-out fights pick up the tension and get the players' hearts beating a bit faster. Although it's dangerous to make firm assumptions about the order in which the players will tackle the encounters you sprinkle in their path, you should give some thought to how you'd like your adventure to progress when you are designing the players' opposition.

2. Heroic Feats and Tests

The AD&D game provides several different systems that allow the players to use their characters' unique abilities to perform heroic stunts and feats: ability checks, saving throws, and proficiency checks. These systems can be used to force the players to overcome a wide variety of obstacles that aren't directly connected to combat.

For example, you might require the adventurers to leap across a narrow chasm (requiring a Dexterity check). Similarly, you might place an extremely valuable jewel in a room full of worthless trinkets; only a successful Appraising proficiency check allows the adventurers to make off with the real prize. For more inspiration, you should re-read the sections on ability checks, proficiency checks, and saving throws in both the *Player's Handbook* and the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*.

One important distinction to keep in mind as you sprinkle opportunities to perform heroic feats and tests throughout your adventure is the difference between ability checks and saving throws. Saving throws improve dramatically with experience level, while ability checks do not. Since a

Dear Dungeoncraft

Dear Dungeoncraft,
When my players travel through the dungeons I've designed, they insist upon drawing highly accurate maps. Since I like to incorporate rooms and corridors of odd shapes and sizes into my dungeons, I end up wasting lots of time describing these rooms in enough detail to allow the party's mapmaker to draw a perfect representation. Is there anything I can do about this problem?

—All Ears in Albany

Dear Ears,
In this case, things will flow much faster if you just draw the party's map yourself. Each time the group enters a new room, pick up their map and pencil it in for them. Of course, you should still make sure that you're forcing the party to spend enough game time in each room to draw such an accurate map (at least 1 turn per average room; 2 or 3 turns for a particularly intricate room). The extra wandering monsters they meet during these delays might soon convince them to change their tactics.

character's experience level is the most important indicator of that character's significance and general aptitude, try to arrange things so that the adventure's most critical heroic feats are resolved by saving throws. As an example, suppose you've decided that, to reach the leader of the evil cult and rescue the princess, the heroes must first make their way through the Caverns of Despair—a magical labyrinth that saps their will to fight. Only heroes with the strongest willpower can hope to negotiate the caverns successfully and reach their quarry. Since Wisdom is a measure of personal willpower, it might seem like a good idea to require each adventurer to make a successful Wisdom check to make his or her way through the caverns. However, this situation is probably best handled with a saving throw vs. paralyzation, since it should always be easier for higher level characters to perform a feat that is so important to the adventure. There's certainly something wrong if a legendary hero has no better chance to complete an important test than a 1st-level character. In this particular case, you can account for characters with high Wisdom scores by allowing them to add their Magical Defense Adjustment to their saving throws.

For similar reasons, an ability check or proficiency check should never be used to resolve a life-and-death situation; always use saving throws to handle these cases. Let's return to the example of the narrow chasm the adventurers must leap to reach a remote portion of the dungeon. While it's reasonable to require a Dexterity check to perform the leap, any characters who fail the check should not fall to their deaths. Instead, give these unfortunates a saving throw vs. breath weapon to catch themselves on a ledge before plummeting. Again, the higher the hero's level, the greater the chance he or she will find a way to survive against all odds. Using saving throws in this fashion also ties nicely to some of the game's other systems and assumptions. After all, shouldn't a *ring of protection +2* help prevent an adventurer from stumbling down a chasm to his or her death? It will if you resolve the situation with a saving throw, but it won't if you rely solely upon an ability check.

Of course, one of the problems with using saving throws in this fashion is that it's sometimes difficult to determine which category to use in any particular situation. To help, here is a recap of some important and often overlooked guidelines from Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Paralyzation, poison, death magic: Situations that call for exceptional force of will or physical fortitude.

Petrification, polymorph: Situations in which a character must withstand massive physical alteration to his or her entire body.

Breath weapon: Situations in which a combination of physical stamina and Dexterity are critical factors in survival.

Spell: Situations that don't fit into any of the other three classifications.

3. Feats of Sorcery

The coolest thing about playing an AD&D wizard or priest is the ability to toss around magical spells. You should strive to keep your spellcasters happy by giving them all sorts of opportunities to exercise their magical abilities and show off for the other players. Generally, this gives you two things to consider when designing your adventures.

First, try to make sure that you eventually give each of the spellcasters in the party an opportunity to cast all of the spells in their various arsenals. If one of your wizards finds a scroll containing the *plant growth* spell and adds it to his or her spellbook, the player will become frustrated if your adventures never provide an opportunity to use the spell. Of course, this doesn't mean that you must include an opportunity for all your spellcasters to use all their spells in every adventure. As you sit down to create each adventure, however, take note of any of the adventurers' magical capabilities you might have been neglecting in recent weeks and try your best to incorporate them.

Second, think about using special riddles, puzzles, and obstacles that can be solved only by the correct application of magic. Suppose, for example, the PCs are pursuing a band of orcs who have captured one of their comrades. Eventually, the characters find the orcs slaughtered in a clearing, but there is no sign of their friend. What should they do? Well, if she's using her head, the party's priest might realize that she can spend a few hours praying and then cast a *speak with dead* spell. It's likely that the dead orcs can provide the PCs with the clue needed to continue the quest.

When you incorporate these sorts of challenges into your adventures, you accomplish two aims. You make sure that the spellcasters have the opportunity to make an important contribution, and you confront the players with an interesting enigma. You can also use this tactic to prevent the PCs from reaching certain parts of the adventure until they're ready. Placing a *wizard lock* on a key door in your dungeon, for example, prevents the party from entering that area until one of their spellcasters obtains a *knock* or *dispel magic* spell.

Join us again in thirty days when we'll begin to lay the groundwork for an actual adventure.

Ray Winninger is an author, a game designer and (curiously) an executive in the high tech industry. This installment begins his second year of "Dungeoncraft."

Sage Advice

By Skip Williams

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This month, the Sage considers the use (and abuse) of spells, proficiencies, and character abilities in the AD&D® game and wraps up with a look at familiars.

A player in my campaign came up with an idea for the *Tenser's destructive resonance* spell in the *Spells & Magic* book. It goes something like this: What if someone purchased a large glass vase, filled it with shards of broken glass or caltrops, and in the center of the vase put a dagger, which would be the target of the spell? The dagger explodes, taking the glass or caltrops with it. Would the glass or caltrops cause damage in addition to the spell damage? If so what would the damage and range of the blast be?

First, you cannot target any spell on something held in a container; there must be an unbroken line between the caster and the target point.

In any case, since the character has packed all the items together to construct a sort of fragmentation bomb, the whole collection should be treated as a single object. (This brings to mind last month's discussion of the *item* spell.) The caster cannot target just one part of the item. If the assembled item weighs more than what the spell can affect, the spell fails. If the spell can affect the new item, the blast should inflict damage equal to the target item's total weight.

In general, *Tenser's destructive resonance* does not produce any shrapnel effects. When there are lots of loose items lying about, items tend to be obliterated in the blast or else largely unaffected (roll item saving throws vs. magical fire). Surviving objects could be scattered around if they weigh less than 1 pound. Roll randomly for direction and distance. Use the grenade scatter diagram from Chapter 9 in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* and orient it so that the "1" position is toward the caster. Objects should move about 1d3×5 feet.

What are the correct rules for natural healing?

Suppose a ring of kender surrounded a battlerager (the dwarf fighter kit), and then the kender proceeded to taunt the dwarf, one after the other, with the next one taunting before the dwarf could attack the previous taunter. Since the taunt automatically affects the battlerager and forces the dwarf to attack the taunting creature, what would happen, since there is more than one taunting creature?

You seem to refer to the special effect of the *taunt* spell on a battlerager in the throes of a killing rage. The kender taunt is not a *taunt* spell, though I suppose you could treat it as one in this instance.

In any case, the battlerager is not obligated to attack the kender unless the dwarf fails his or her saving throw vs. the kender taunt or until the killing rage builds up. (The latter takes 5 rounds.) If the battlerager fails a saving throw vs. the kender taunt, the dwarf attacks the kender who made the taunt and suffers all the penalties the taunt imposes (a –2 penalty to attack rolls and Armor Class). Once the battlerager's killing rage kicks in, the rage bonuses partially offset the taunt penalties. (See the battlerager kit description in *The Complete Book of Dwarves*.)

If a battlerager is ever subjected to multiple taunt effects, he or she attacks the nearest taunter and presses the attack until that taunter is dead (even if subjected to a new taunt effect), then moves on to the next nearest taunter. If two taunters are equidistant, randomly determine which one the battlerager attacks.

Can a *restoration* spell be used to restore drained ability scores other than Constitution? The spell mentions only Constitution loss, but I thought the idea was to restore any permanent loss.

The *restoration* spell description in the current *Player's Handbook* doesn't mention Constitution loss, only Intelligence lost to a *feeblemind* spell. I recommend, however, that you allow a *restoration* spell to restore all ability score points lost to a single ability, provided the loss came from a creature or item's special attack. For example, if a character loses several

points of Wisdom in a battle with a lamia, one *restoration* spell should restore all the lost points.

A *restoration* spell will not restore Constitution points lost from being killed and subsequently raised from the dead, nor will it restore a Constitution point lost due to casting the *permanency* spell.

I'm confused about the gem values required for some wizard spells. For example the *lesser sign of sealing* spell requires a pinch of gem dust worth at least 100 gp—a sapphire for electricity. A sapphire, however, has a base value of 1,000 gp. I know gems of lesser value are possible, but these are pretty rare, and a gem of only a tenth the base value is extremely rare. Then there are the gems needed for the *conjure elemental-kin* spell, which requires an aquamarine, amber, ruby, or emerald worth 1,500 gp. Ambers are commonly worth only 100 gp, and aquamarines are typically only 500 gp. It would be difficult to find a 1,500-gp aquamarine and even harder to discover a 1,500 gp amber. Since the spell description says you need a gem worth 1,500 gp (instead of 1,500 gp worth of gems), it seems this spell cannot be used with ambers or aquamarines very often.

Read the material component entry carefully. If it calls for a single gem, that is what you must have. If it calls for a certain monetary value of gems, you can combine smaller stones to achieve the necessary amount. For example, the *lesser sign of sealing* spell requires 100 gp worth of gem dust, not a single gem.

If a spell requires a single gem of a certain value, you can cut large gems into smaller, less valuable pieces (or just use a gem that is bigger than you need), but you can't combine smaller gems to get the required amount. For example, you can cut a 1,000-gp stone into ten 100-gp pieces (or perhaps only eight or nine 100-gp pieces if the DM wants to allow for wastage and jeweler's fees) for use in spells that require 100-gp gems. You cannot, however, use fifteen 100-gp stones in a spell that requires a single 1,500-gp gem.

Note that the gem in a *conjure elemental-kin* spell is a focus; it is not consumed, but the caster must have it to cast the spell. The material components (which are consumed) are incense, clay, sulfur and phosphorus, or else water and sand.

Help on Healing

What are the correct rules for natural healing? Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook* says characters heal naturally at a rate of 1 hit point per day of low activity or 3 hit points per day of complete bed rest. In the section on the Healing proficiency, it says that a character can help others heal at a rate of 1 hit point per day or 2 points per day of bed rest, but that both Healing and Herbalism are required to heal 3 hit points per day.

This is a long-standing error in the *Player's Handbook* that has defied correction through numerous reprints of the book.

I suggest you just add up the healing values. That is, a character regains 1 hit point per day of light activity or 3 hit points per day of complete rest. A character who receives a healer's care while being restricted to light activity regains 2 hit points a day (1 point naturally and 1 from the healer). Characters who enjoy complete rest while receiving a healer's care regain 5 hit points a day (3 points naturally and 2 from the healer), or 6 points a day if the healer is also an herbalist.

"Sage Advice" has handled this question before, and the answer given here supersedes the older advice.

The description for the Healing proficiency in the *Player's Handbook* has a line that reads: "Only characters with both Healing and Herbalism proficiencies can attempt the same treatment for poisons the victim has swallowed or touched." What does this mean?

The line refers to the procedure for treating a poison, which begins in the third paragraph of the proficiency description. It means that a character must have both the Healing and Herbalism proficiencies to treat an ingested or contact poison. (If you just have the Healing, you can only treat injected poisons.) You also need both Healing and Herbalism to treat inhaled poisons.

If someone willingly receives a *nap* spell, how easy would it be to wake up that person while the spell is in effect? Would it be considered normal sleep or magical sleep from which they would only wake if attacked?

Treat it just like a *sleep* spell; it would take some rough physical contact—slapping or wounding—to awaken the recipient.

Note that only willing recipients can receive *nap* spells.

The standard bard ability to use all written magical items at 10th level isn't mentioned in the description of the Loremaster in *The Complete Bard's Handbook*. Is this replaced by the Arcane Lore ability? When using the Arcane Lore ability, does a failed Wisdom check indicate a misread scroll? That is, does the spell on the scroll go awry if the Wisdom check fails?

Loremasters receive the Arcane Lore ability instead of the standard bard ability to use written items. When reading a scroll, the Loremaster can attempt a Wisdom check. If the check succeeds, the character can use the scroll. If the check fails, the character can't use the scroll. A failed roll does not cause a mishap, but I recommend that a mishap occur on a roll of 20.

Does the psionic power *truthear* indicate when the subject tries to lie or merely when the subject doesn't speak the truth? What happens when the subject merely stretches the truth?

The power works just like the *detect lie* spell. It detects intentionally false statements—things the subject knows or believes are not true. If the subject speaks the literal truth, the power does not detect a falsehood even if the subject is twisting or stretching the truth.

What are the costs of the Contact psionic ability (from *The Complete Psionics Handbook*) for targets with Hit Dice over 20? Is it even possible to use Contact on creatures with more than 20 Hit Dice?

Yes, it's possible to make contact with creatures of more than 20 Hit Dice. I suggest a cost of 23 for all creatures of 21 Hit Dice or more, though you can just extend the table in the power description by adding 5 points for every group of 5 Hit Dice beyond 20.

Is there any limit to the total number of languages a druid can speak?

Not really. A druid's Intelligence score (and number of available proficiency slots, if you're using the optional proficiency rules) determine how many languages the character can speak, just at it does for any other character. However, the druid also gains extra languages as a class ability (the secret language of druids, plus one woodland language every three levels). These languages are free and do not count against the character's Intelligence limit nor do they require proficiency slots.

Is a *clone*, once grown, magical? Does it radiate magic? Can it be dispelled? Can it enter antimagic zones?

Is there any limit to the total number of languages a druid can speak?

The magic of a *clone* spell ends once the cloning is complete. The resulting creature is not magical and does not radiate magic (though a character with the Spellcraft proficiency might be able to recognize it as a magically created being). Antimagic has no special effect on clones, and clones cannot be dispelled or destroyed by effects that disrupt magic.

I'm confused about the difference between maces and morningstars. Not all maces are flanged, right? Aren't spiked maces practically the same thing as morning stars? If not, what's the difference between a spiked mace and a morningstar? Is it spike length?

In the D&D® and AD&D games, a mace is always a blunt weapon. It has a fairly thin, short haft (like the handle of a hand axe) and a head that might have ridges, flanges, or knobs. Technically, a mace could have a spiked head, but then it would be a type P/B weapon instead of type B, and clerics could not use it, though it would still inflict mace damage and require the Mace proficiency to use.

A morningstar is not simply a spiked mace; it is a much larger weapon that resembles a baseball bat with rows of spikes set in the business end.

You might come across books that identify maces or flails with heads consisting of round balls set with sharp spikes as morningstars, but this does not reflect the nomenclature of the D&D game.

Exactly how long does a *changestaff* spell last? Is it permanent? If the caster died and you found the caster's remains hundreds of years later, could you use the staff?

A *changestaff* spell lasts until it is dispelled or the staff is destroyed. The completed staff can be used only once per day for a maximum of 1 turn per caster level, and only the caster can use the staff.

I have some questions about mechanicals from *The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook*. How do you make a mechanical's steam power source start again after it has worked for its total minutes of activity? How quickly does a spring-powered mechanical exhaust its power? Do you have to wind it for 1 round for every minute of activity or for every minute it just sits there?

Any mechanical's endurance is measured in rounds of activity; a mechanical does not use power by just sitting still.

Steam-powered mechanicals can be refueled. I recommend 1 round of work and 1 to 10 gp (set a value appropriate to your game) worth of fuel for every minute the mechanical runs. Also roll 1d20 at each refueling. On a roll of 1 the mechanical explodes after 1d6 rounds.

How does a thief's Backstab ability work with the critical hit system from the *PLAYER'S OPTION®: Combat & Tactics* rules? Will a successful backstab always be a torso hit? How do you calculate damage?

Just go through the critical hit procedure normally. Assuming a backstab is always a torso hit is fine as a house rule, but it doesn't have to be that way. In any case, determine whether a critical hit occurs and what effect the critical hit has before calculating the backstab damage. A backstab does not increase or otherwise alter any special effect a critical hit might have (such as severing, crushing, bleeding, or movement reduction). You might want to reroll some criticals or bump up the severity roll; for example, you might decide that a successful backstab does not cause a graze effect.

When a critical hit doubles or triples damage, add the multiples to the multiples from the backstab. For example, a ×2 (one extra multiple) damage critical hit coupled with a ×3 (two extra multiples) backstab yields ×4 damage (×1 for the base damage plus three extra multiples). A ×3 damage critical hit coupled with a ×3 backstab yields ×5 damage (1+2+2).

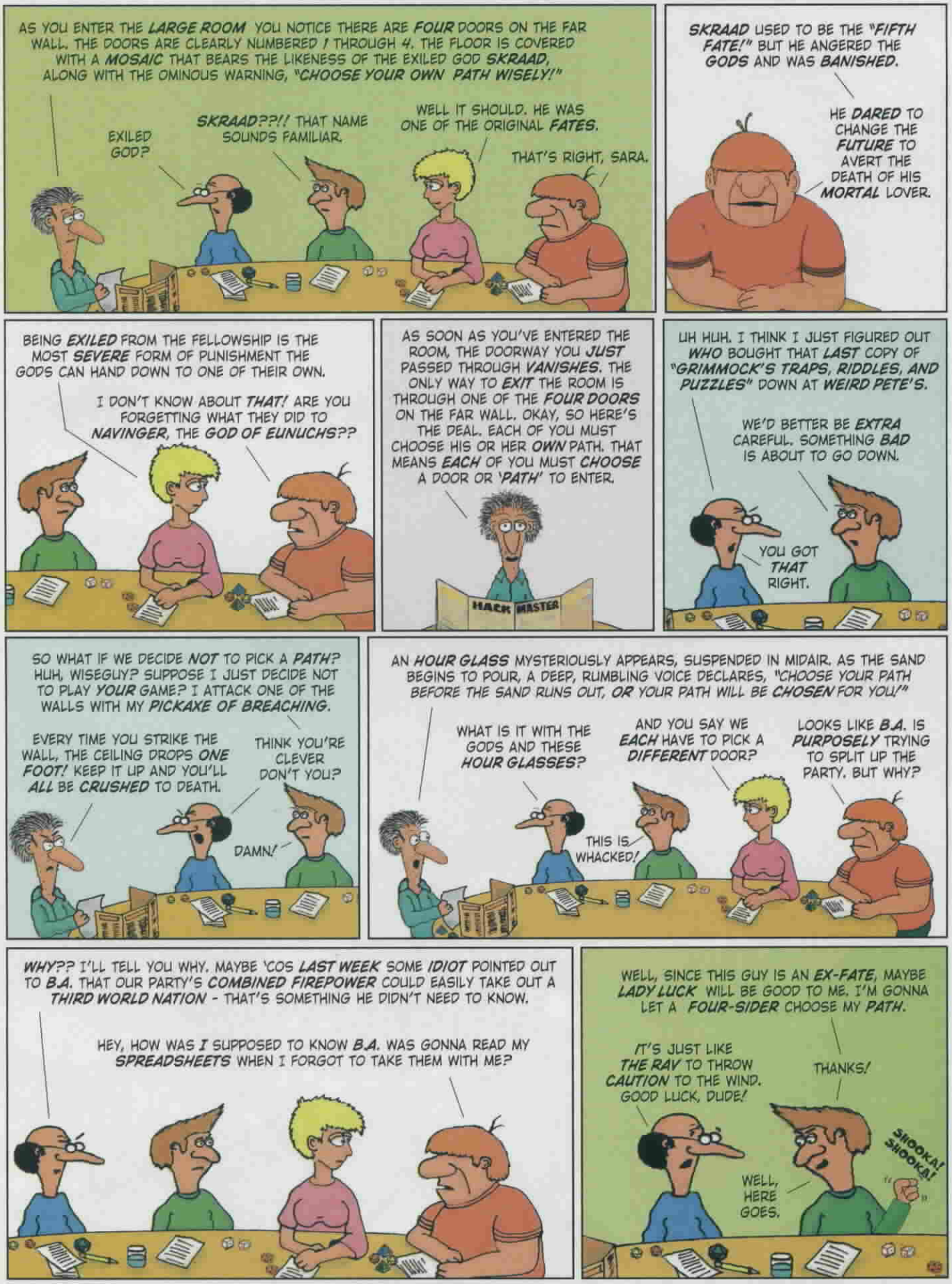
I've noticed that the familiars listed in the *Player's Handbook* have different statistics from those listed for similar animals in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome. For example, cat familiars have Armor Class 7 and Intelligence scores of only 2 or 3. In the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome, however, domestic cats have Armor Class 6 and Intelligence scores of 9. Which statistics should we use?

My copy of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome gives cats an Intelligence of 1, a movement of 9, and an AC of 6. In general, when dealing with familiars, use the statistics in the *Player's Handbook*. A cat familiar, however, has an Armor Class of 6 and is semi-intelligent (2–3). You might want to give domestic cats (and familiars) a movement rate of 12—they sure aren't slower than people.

Skip Williams is a confirmed cat lover who shares his Seattle area home with Cyrano de Bratcat (and also with his wife, Penny). Cyrano is a bluepoint Siamese with amazing vocal prowess and enough feline charm to bring most humans to their knees. Nevertheless, Skip assures us he's never met a cat that could claim an Intelligence score as high as 9.

Knights of the Dinner Table

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN


AS YOU ENTER THE LARGE ROOM YOU NOTICE THERE ARE FOUR DOORS ON THE FAR WALL. THE DOORS ARE CLEARLY NUMBERED 1 THROUGH 4. THE FLOOR IS COVERED WITH A MOSAIC THAT BEARS THE LIKENESS OF THE EXILED GOD SKRAAD, ALONG WITH THE OMINOUS WARNING, "CHOOSE YOUR OWN PATH WISELY!"
EXILED GOD?
SKRAAD??!! THAT NAME SOUNDS FAMILIAR.
WELL IT SHOULD. HE WAS ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FATES.
THAT'S RIGHT, SARA.
SKRAAD USED TO BE THE "FIFTH FATE!" BUT HE ANGERED THE GODS AND WAS BANISHED.
HE DARED TO CHANGE THE FUTURE TO AVERT THE DEATH OF HIS MORTAL LOVER.
BEING EXILED FROM THE FELLOWSHIP IS THE MOST SEVERE FORM OF PUNISHMENT THE GODS CAN HAND DOWN TO ONE OF THEIR OWN.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT! ARE YOU FORGETTING WHAT THEY DID TO NAVINGER, THE GOD OF EUNUCHS??
AS SOON AS YOU'VE ENTERED THE ROOM, THE DOORWAY YOU JUST PASSED THROUGH VANISHES. THE ONLY WAY TO EXIT THE ROOM IS THROUGH ONE OF THE FOUR DOORS ON THE FAR WALL. OKAY, SO HERE'S THE DEAL. EACH OF YOU MUST CHOOSE HIS OR HER OWN PATH. THAT MEANS EACH OF YOU MUST CHOOSE A DOOR OR 'PATH' TO ENTER.
HACK MASTER
UH HUH. I THINK I JUST FIGURED OUT WHO BOUGHT THAT LAST COPY OF "GRIMMOCK'S TRAPS, RIDDLES, AND PUZZLES" DOWN AT WEIRD PETE'S.
WE'D BETTER BE EXTRA CAREFUL. SOMETHING BAD IS ABOUT TO GO DOWN.
YOU GOT THAT RIGHT.
SO WHAT IF WE DECIDE NOT TO PICK A PATH? HUH, WISEGUY? SUPPOSE I JUST DECIDE NOT TO PLAY YOUR GAME? I ATTACK ONE OF THE WALLS WITH MY PICKAXE OF BREACHING.
EVERY TIME YOU STRIKE THE WALL, THE CEILING DROPS ONE FOOT! KEEP IT UP AND YOU'LL ALL BE CRUSHED TO DEATH.
THINK YOU'RE CLEVER DON'T YOU?
DAMN!
AN HOUR GLASS MYSTERIOUSLY APPEARS, SUSPENDED IN MIDAIR. AS THE SAND BEGINS TO POUR, A DEEP, RUMBLING VOICE DECLARES, "CHOOSE YOUR PATH BEFORE THE SAND RUNS OUT, OR YOUR PATH WILL BE CHOSEN FOR YOU!"
WHAT IS IT WITH THE GODS AND THESE HOUR GLASSES?
AND YOU SAY WE EACH HAVE TO PICK A DIFFERENT DOOR?
LOOKS LIKE B.A. IS PURPOSELY TRYING TO SPLIT UP THE PARTY. BUT WHY?
THIS IS WHACKED!
WHY?? I'LL TELL YOU WHY. MAYBE 'COS LAST WEEK SOME IDIOT POINTED OUT TO B.A. THAT OUR PARTY'S COMBINED FIREPOWER COULD EASILY TAKE OUT A THIRD WORLD NATION - THAT'S SOMETHING HE DIDN'T NEED TO KNOW.
HEY, HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW B.A. WAS GONNA READ MY SPREADSHEETS WHEN I FORGOT TO TAKE THEM WITH ME?
WELL, SINCE THIS GUY IS AN EX-FATE, MAYBE LADY LUCK WILL BE GOOD TO ME. I'M GONNA LET A FOUR-SIDER CHOOSE MY PATH.
IT'S JUST LIKE THE RAV TO THROW CAUTION TO THE WIND. GOOD LUCK, DUDE!
THANKS!
WELL, HERE GOES.
SHOOKA! SHOOKA!

©1999 LICENSE TO HACK

A FEW MINUTES LATER...
OKAY DAVE, YOU WALK THROUGH DOOR NUMBER THREE AND VANISH FROM SIGHT. I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE OTHERS HAVE CHOSEN THEIR PATHS. WHO'S UP NEXT?
I GUESS I AM. -GULP- I'LL TAKE DOOR FOUR - NO WAIT!! MAKE THAT NUMBER TWO.
YOU'RE PICKING DOOR TWO? ARE YOU SURE?
UH ... ER ... NO, GIMME DOOR FOUR! YEAH, FOUR! I GO WITH DOOR FOUR.
FOUR IT IS! YOU ENTER THE DOOR AND VANISH FROM SIGHT. AGAIN, I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR CHARACTER ONCE EVERYONE ELSE HAS GONE THROUGH A DOOR.
VANISH? I HOLD UP MY HAND IN FRONT OF MY FACE. CAN I SEE IT?
SORRY, BOB. I CAN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING JUST YET.
OKAY, LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH. I PICK DOOR NUMBER ONE!
TEN MINUTES LATER...
SO YOU ALL CHOSE YOUR OWN PATH AND STEPPED THROUGH A DOOR. ODDLY ENOUGH YOU ARE SIMPLY TELEPORTED TO A SMALL GRASSY KNOLL JUST OFF THE PATH THAT LEADS YOU TO THE DUNGEON ENTRANCE.
THAT'S IT? WE WENT THROUGH ALL THIS RIGMAROLE JUST TO GET A FREE RIDE TO THE SURFACE?
I KNEW I SHOULD'A PICKED DOOR NUMBER TWO!
HOW ODD. I GUESS B.A. WAS JUST TRYING TO GET A RISE OUT OF US.
HOW LAME!
THERE IS ONE MINOR DETAIL I HAVE TO CONVEY TO BOB IN PRIVATE. CAN THE REST OF YOU GRAB A SODA AND WAIT OUT IN THE LIVING ROOM FOR A FEW MINUTES?
MINOR DETAIL? CRIPES! I KNEW I WAS GOING TO GET SCREWED ON THIS DEAL.
TOUGH BREAK, DUDE.
AH HA! MY HUNCH WAS RIGHT!
A WEE BIT LATER...
THAT'S RIGHT, YOUR CHARACTER HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A PREDATOR DOPPELGANGER. THE ROOM WAS A BAIT-TRAP SO HE COULD FIND A HOST TO PERPETUATE HIS EVIL ON THE WORLD.
OH MAN. THIS IS HEAVY!!
I'M WILLING TO LET YOU ROLEPLAY YOUR DOUBLE AS LONG AS YOU SWEAR TO PLAY HIM PROPERLY. AS AN INCENTIVE, I'LL GIVE YOU A 2,000 EXPERIENCE-POINT BONUS WHEN THE SITUATION IS RESOLVED. THINK YOU CAN HANDLE IT?
CAN I HANDLE IT? ARE YOU KIDDING?
YOU JUST GAVE ME A LICENSE TO HACK! THIS IS AWESOME! I CAN SCREW WITH THE OTHER GUYS AND STUFF AND THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD IT AGAINST ME 'COS I'M NOT ACCOUNTABLE.
I LIKE YOUR ENTHUSIASM. LET'S BRING THE OTHERS BACK IN.
THIS IS GOING TO BE SO KEWL! HEH HEH.
FIVE MINUTES LATER...
OKAY SO YOU'RE ALL STANDING ON THE GRASSY KNOLL. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO ...
WAIT!!
HACK MASTER
I THROW MY NET-OF-ENSNAREMENT +5 OVER BOB AND DOUSE HIM WITH FLAMING OIL! THEN I RUN HIM THROUGH WITH MY DAGGER OF VITAL ORGAN SEEKING. STRIKE ONE DOPPELGANGER!!
!!???
GAAA!! WHAT THE ...?? HOW? WHO?
AFTER THE GAME...
BOB'S FIT TO BE TIED. SO, HOW DID YOU FIGURE IT OUT?
B.A. SHOULDN'T HAVE TOLD US THE NAME OF THE ADVENTURE HE WAS RUNNING. "THE DOPPLER EFFECT" WAS A DEAD GIVEAWAY.

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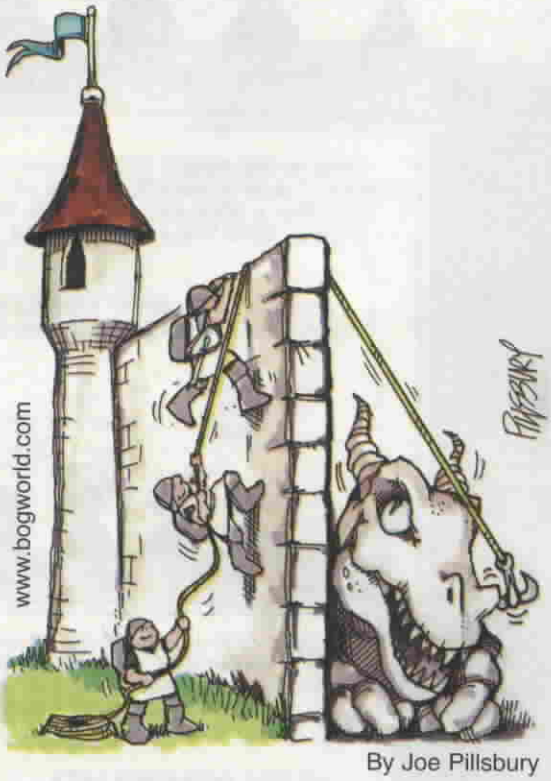
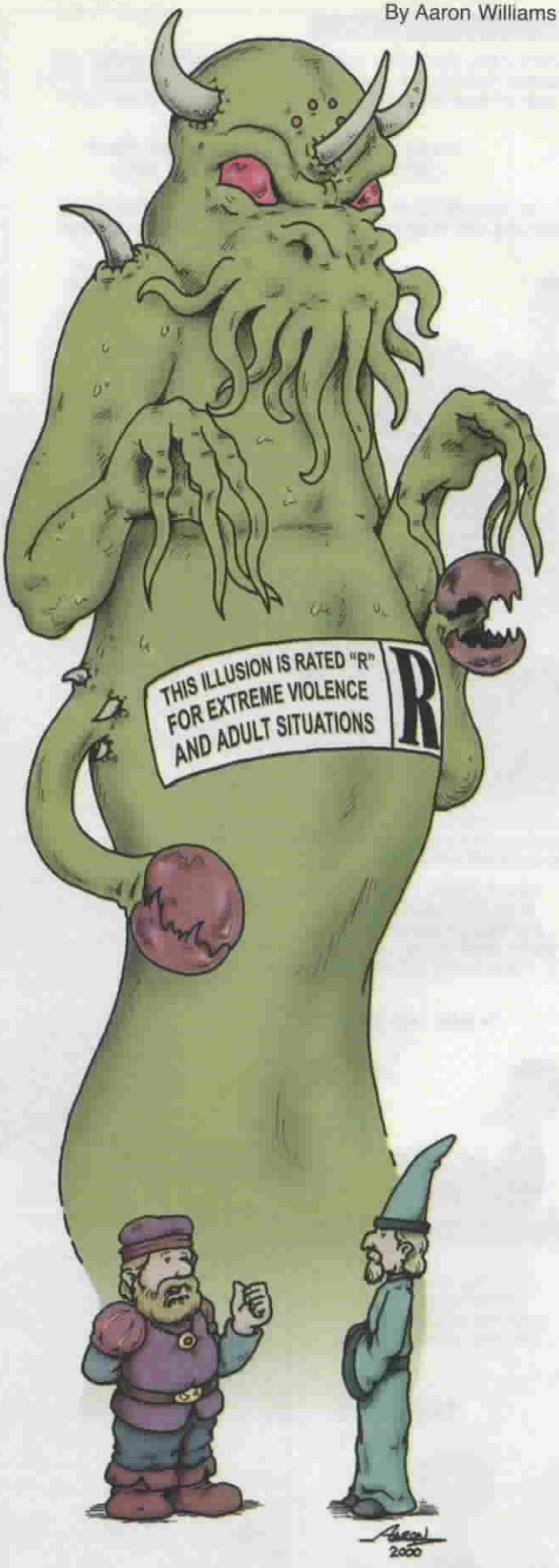
Send story ideas to jollyrb@aol.com or KODT, 1003 Monroe Pike, Marion, IN 46953

Dragon Mirth™



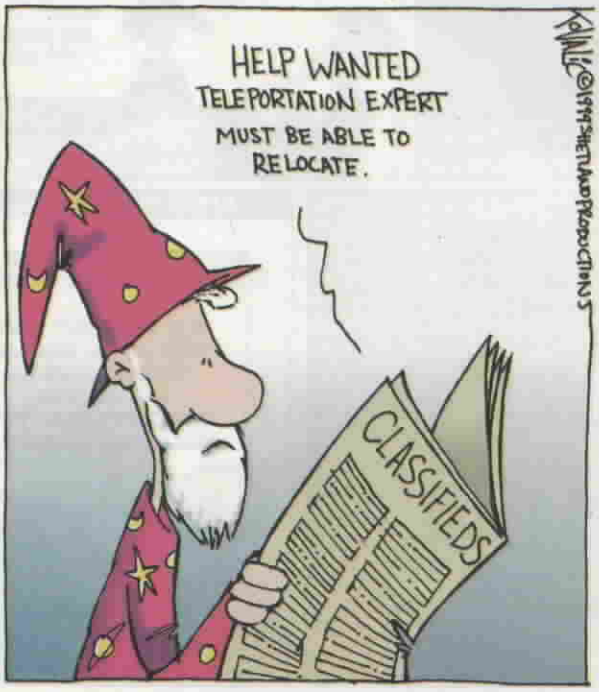
By Joe Pillsbury

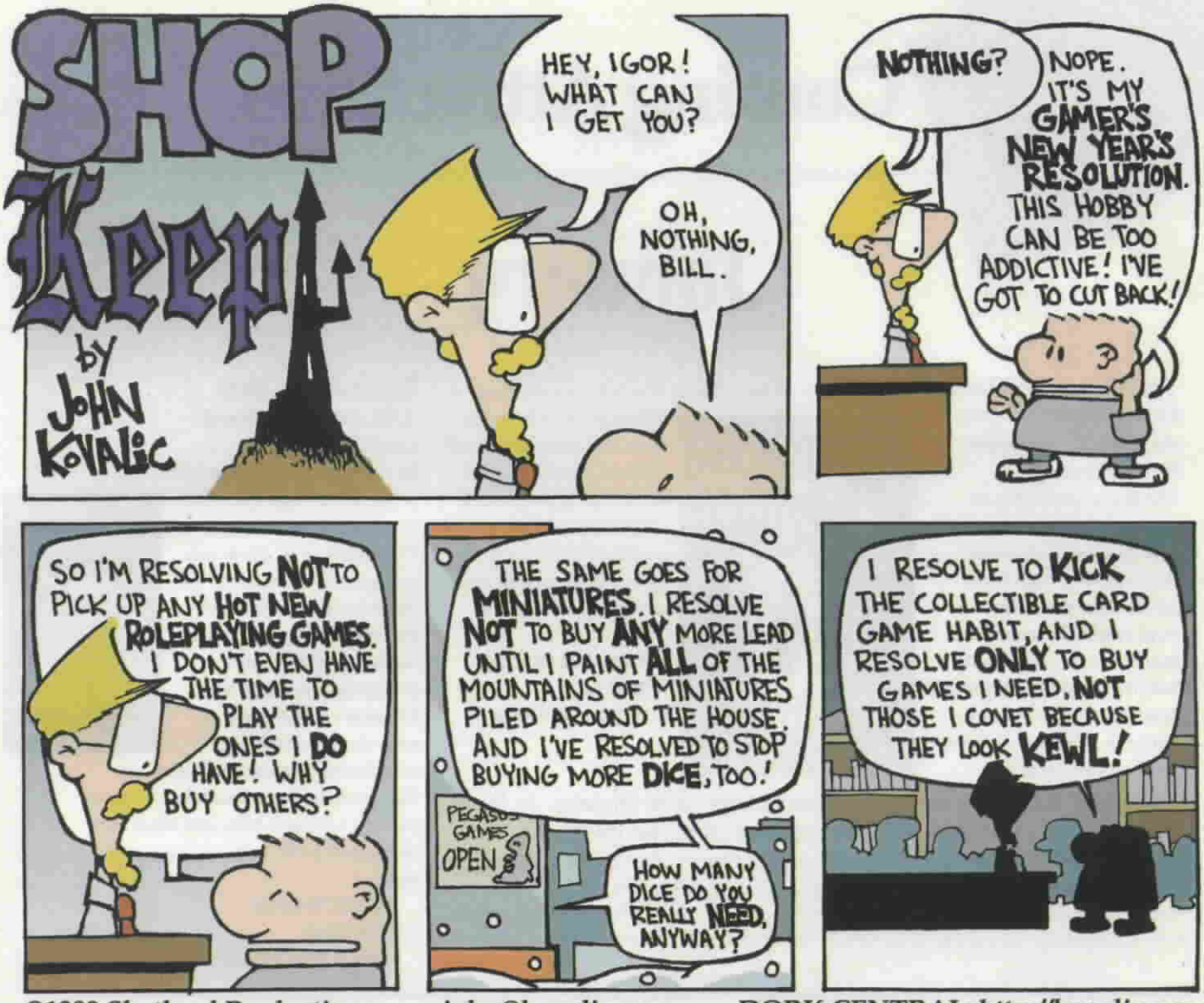
By Aaron Williams



"While your guild's child protection requirements are commendable, they make your spell's use as a theft deterrant about as effective as dryer lint!!!"

The Unspeakable Oaf by John Kovalic




SHOP-Keep
by JOHN KOVALIC
HEY, IGOR! WHAT CAN I GET YOU?
OH, NOTHING, BILL.
NOTHING?
NOPE. IT'S MY GAMER'S NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION. THIS HOBBY CAN BE TOO ADDICTIVE! I'VE GOT TO CUT BACK!
SO I'M RESOLVING NOT TO PICK UP ANY HOT NEW ROLEPLAYING GAMES. I DON'T EVEN HAVE THE TIME TO PLAY THE ONES I DO HAVE! WHY BUY OTHERS?
THE SAME GOES FOR MINIATURES. I RESOLVE NOT TO BUY ANY MORE LEAD UNTIL I PAINT ALL OF THE MOUNTAINS OF MINIATURES PILED AROUND THE HOUSE. AND I'VE RESOLVED TO STOP BUYING MORE DICE, TOO!
PEGASUS GAMES OPEN
HOW MANY DICE DO YOU REALLY NEED, ANYWAY?
I RESOLVE TO KICK THE COLLECTIBLE CARD GAME HABIT, AND I RESOLVE ONLY TO BUY GAMES I NEED. NOT THOSE I COVET BECAUSE THEY LOOK KEWL!

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BWA HA HA HA HA HAH HA HA HA HA HA WHOOP HA HA
:SNIFF: OK. SERIOUSLY. WHAT CAN I GET YOU?
ONE OF EVERYTHING. WAIT: BETTER MAKE IT TWO, TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE...
KOVALIC

WHAT'S NEW WITH PHIL AND DIXIE™

By Phil Foglio

"WHAT"- SAID THE EVER PATIENT GIRL SIDEKICK- "ARE YOU DOING?"
IN MY GARDEN?!
THIS MONTH WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SUBTERRANIAN CREATURES.
WHY NOT? THERE ARE SO MANY UNDERGROUND RACES, MONSTERS, AND LOST CITIES, THAT THERE SHOULD BE SOME-THING RIGHT HERE.
DIG WE MUST
WHOA! GIANT WORMS!! NOW THATS A NEW ONE!
THAT'S MY TRUFFLE PATCH!!
COMPO
4
um.. DIXIE, I KEEP TELLING YOU — CHOCOLATE DOESN'T-
GIMME THAT SHOVEL!!
STORIES ABOUT 'MONSTERS IN THE EARTH' ARE SOME OF THE OLDEST STORIES THERE ARE, POSSIBLY BASED ON ENCOUNTERS WITH CAVE DWELLING NEANDERTHALS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO.
TODAY WE JUST LIVE IN MOM'S BASEMENT.
WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!
PELLUCIDAR ELEVATOR CO.
KODT
STORIES OF 'HIDDEN TREASURE' CAME FROM PRIMITIVE PEOPLES WHO HAD YET TO GRASP THE CONCEPTS OF MINING AND- MY SHOVEL!
RATS. IT GOT AWAY!
MY MOM GAVE ME THIS SHOVEL.
IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FRIENDLY, YOU KNOW.
SO WHAT? WHAT POSSIBLE USE WOULD WE HAVE FOR A GIANT WORM?
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CHURP?
END.